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Does food have any connection with developing spiritual life?

Scripture, tradition, and also experience say, Yes. Although the end of spirituality goes beyond body and mind, it begins in the mind, which is enshrined in the body. To nourish the body, we need food. Similarly, every human needs food for the mind also.

In Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (1.5.1) we find
“यत् सप्त अन्नानि मेधया तपसा अजनयत् पिता ।”

Father, the Doer (like Hiranyagarbha) created seven kinds of food through meditation and rites.

एकमन्य साधरणं – One food for all beings
द्वे देवान अभाजयत् – Two foods for gods
त्रिण आत्मने – Three for himself and
एकम् पशुभ्य – One for the animals

What are these three foods that the Doer kept for the Self?

The same Upanishad answers (1.5.3):

मनो वाचं प्राणम – the mind, the organ of speech, and the vital force.

Our mind collects information through the five sense organs of knowledge, namely, eye (see), ear (hear), nose (smell), skin (touch), and tongue (taste). These five organs go out and get attached to five sense objects – Rupa (form), Sabda (sound), Gandha (smell), Sparsha (touch), and Rasa (taste). All this information goes to the mind, and the mind reacts to it.

This whole process is called आहार – eating.

It is said in the scriptures that the human mind is the cause of bondage (suffering) and liberation (happiness). Therefore, Sanatana Dharma or Hinduism lays stress on the purification of the mind. Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna said “शुद्ध मन शुद्ध आत्मा एक” pure mind and pure Atman are the same.

Shankaracharya has also given stress on the purification of the mind for spiritual realization.
मनः शुद्धि प्रकरणः – mind should be purified.

Lord Jesus mentioned that they will surely see God whose minds are pure.

What is this purity?

To be free from worldliness and full of godliness is purity.

How can this purity be achieved? By purifying food – आहार शुद्धि.

Those who are sincere must take care of these foods which disturb the tranquility of the mind. Some people give a lot of importance to physical food – the food we eat to maintain our bodies. But we must know that the body is not the cause of bondage, and the body cannot take us to liberation either. Bhagavad Gita, chapter 17, verses 8, 9, and 10 give descriptions of Sattva, Raja, and Tama kinds of food.

आयुःसत्त्वबलारोग्यसुखप्रीतिविवर्धनाः ।

रस्याः स्निग्धाः स्थिरा हृद्या आहाराः सात्त्विकप्रियाः ॥ 8 ॥

*āyuh-sattva-balārogya-sukha-prīti-vivardhanāḥ
rasyāḥ snigdhaḥ sthīrā hṛidyā āhārāḥ sāttvika-priyāḥ.*

Food that promotes longevity, vitality, strength, health, pleasure, appetite, and that is succulent, oleaginous, substantial, and agreeable is favored by people endowed with sattva.

कद्वल्लवणात्युष्णतीक्ष्णरूक्षविदाहिनः ।

आहारा राजसस्येष्टा दुःखशोकामयप्रदाः ॥ 9 ॥

*kaṭo-amlā-lavanāty-uṣṇa-tikṣṇa-rūkṣa-vidāhinaḥ
āhārā rājasasyeṣṭā duḥkha-śhokāmaya-pradāḥ.*

Food that is excessively bitter, sour, salty, hot, acrid, dry, and burning is liked by people endowed with rajas. It causes pain, grief, and disease.

यातयामं गतरसं पूति पर्युषितं च यत् ।

उच्छिष्टमपि चामेध्यं भोजनं तामसप्रियम् ॥ 10 ॥

*yāta-yāmam gata-rasam pūti paryuṣhitam cha yat
uchchhiṣṭam api chāmedhyam bhojanam tāmasa-
priyam.*

And food that is ill-cooked, tasteless, putrid, stale, unclean, and leftover is favored by people endowed with tamas.



About food, we find a very interesting and important verse in the Bhagavatam (1.13.47).

अहस्तानि सहस्तानामपदानि चतुष्पसदाम्
फल्गुनि तत्र महतां जीवो जीवस्य जीवनम् ॥

*Ahastāni sahashtānām apadāni catus-padam
Phalgūni tatra mahatām, jīvo jīvasya jīvanam.*

Creatures without arms (animals) are the food of creatures with arms (human beings). Feet-less beings (vegetation) are the food for four-footed creatures (animals). Even among these, the smaller creatures are the food of the bigger ones. Thus, one kind of living being is the food for another. Nature has made ample arrangements for food for all. You need not be anxious.

Food has its effect on the mind no doubt, but that is very little barrier in the path of self-realization. It is through austerity only that the human mind can be purified. By detaching the mind from the attraction of the worldly objects and simultaneously focusing on the Supreme self, the source of everything.

In Gita again, Lord Krishna gave three types of austerities in chapter 17, verses 14, 15, and 16.

देवद्विजगुरुप्राज्ञपूजनं शौचमार्जवम् ।
ब्रह्मचर्यमहिंसा च शारीरं तप उच्यते ॥ 14॥

*deva-dwija-guru-prājña-pūjanam śhaucham ārjavam
brahmacharyam ahinsā cha śhārīram tapa uchyate.*

Worship of the gods, of the twice-born, of teachers, and of the wise; cleanliness, uprightness,

continence, and non-violence – these are said to be the austerity of the body.

अनुद्वेगकरं वाक्यं सत्यं प्रियहितं च यत् ।
स्वाध्यायाभ्यसनं चैव वाङ्मयं तप उच्यते ॥ 15 ॥

*anudvega-karam vākyaṁ satyaṁ priya-hitam cha yat
svādhyāyābhyasanam chaiva vāñ-mayaṁ tapa uchyate.*

Words that do not give offense and are truthful, pleasant, and beneficial, and the regular recitation of the Vedas – these are said to be the austerity of speech.

मनः प्रसादः सौम्यत्वं मौनमात्मविनिग्रहः ।
भावसंशुद्धिरित्येतत्तपो मानसमुच्यते ॥ 16॥

*manah-prasādaḥ saumyatvaṁ maunam ātma-
vinigrahaḥ*

bhāva-sanśhuddhir ity etat tapo mānasam uchyate

The serenity of the mind, gentleness, silence, self-control, and purity of heart –constitute the austerity of the mind.

Hindus' realization revealed that the Supreme Being or Brahman is the Creator of this Universe. It is the Material cause and also the Efficient cause. This realization is called 'True Knowledge.' In the Bhagavatam, also we find (1.13.48) – All this Universe is Lord's alone. He is the soul of the souls --- He has become many by his mysterious power of Maya.

A true aspirant must know the secret of "food" that will keep his/her body healthy and mind free from worldly attachment and be Free.



Excerpt from the “Conversation Holy Mother II – Purity regarding food”

(greatmaster.info/saradadevi/conversations/conversationsarada1-90/)

Durga Babu : Mother, while performing my duties in the hospital, many a time I feel thirsty. I feel compelled to drink water irrespective of place and persons. As a matter of fact, I do so. What do you say to that, Mother ?

***Mother** : What else can you do? You do it in connection with the discharge of your duty. Remember the Master while you drink the water. As you do this while on duty, it will not injure you. Is it ever possible for those who are called upon to perform various odd duties to observe all religious injunctions regarding food ?*

These two articles are prepared based on the “Know & Love Series” Lectures delivered at the of the Home of Harmony.

Food and Religion

Colleen Taylor Sen
Food historian and author



Food plays a role in every religion. This relationship is a vast topic that could be the subject of an entire college course. In this article, I will describe a few practices and beliefs shared by many religions together with their historical origins. My focus will be on six major religions: the three Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – and three religions that originated in South Asia – Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

Sacrifice

Some scholars believe that sacrifice is at the root of all religions. The English word sacrifice comes from the Latin *sacrificium*, from *sacer*, meaning sacred, and *facere*, meaning “to make.”. In ancient times, offerings to the deities took the form of a sacrifice of an animal in order to placate or pacify a deity. The meat was shared by the priests and the sponsors of the sacrifice. Sacrifices were part of the ancient Vedic religion in India, early Judaism, the religions of ancient Greece and Rome, Egypt, Central and South America, and many others.

This painting shows a painting by Rembrandt that depicts an incident in the Old Testament when God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son as a test of his faith. When he is about to do so, a messenger from God stops Abraham, saying, "Now I know you fear God". Abraham looks up and sees a ram sent by God and sacrifices it instead. Abraham is considered the first prophet in Islam, Judaism and Christianity; hence the name Abrahamic religions. (In Judaism, the son's name is Isaac, in Islam Ishmael). This event is commemorated in Islam's the second most important holiday Eid-al-Adha, or feast of the Sacrifice. A lamb is killed, and part of their meat is consumed by the family offering the

animal for sacrifice, while the rest is distributed to the poor and the needy.

Over time the sacrifice declined in many cultures and was replaced by symbolic offerings. In Judaism, after the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE,, sacrifices were prohibited because the Temple had been the only place where people were allowed to make sacrifices. Today, since there is no longer a temple, modern religious Jews instead pray or give charity to atone for their sins, something the sacrifice would have accomplished.

In Christianity the sacrifice of Christ, who is called the “Lamb of God”, replaced the animal sacrifice of the Old Testament. The Eucharist or Holy Communion is a ritual commemoration of Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples before his crucifixion. It is the central act of Christian worship practiced by most Christian churches in some form. In the Communion, the priest or pastor distributes wafers and wine to the believers. In some Protestant denominations that forbid alcohol the wine is replaced by grape juice. (Welsh's grape juice was invented by Joseph Welsh in 1869 as a substitute for wine in churches who prohibited alcohol).

In India, animals sacrifice began to disappear under the influence of the Jains and Buddhists several centuries BC. These movements advocated nonviolence and opposed the killing of animals even for food. In place of animals, the priests began to offer clarified butter, rice and other foods to the deities. Today Hindu pujas – a worship service at home or at a temple – food is part of the offerings made to the deity who is represented

by a statue. These offerings typically include fruits, coconut, nuts, and flowers. However, animal sacrifice is still practiced in parts of India among followers of the goddess Shakti, especially in the Northeast. At the 200-year-old Kalighat temple in Kolkata, goats are sacrificed every day.

Dietary Restrictions and Regulations

A more personal form of sacrifice are dietary restrictions, which can be permanent or intermittent. An example of the former are Jewish dietary laws which are very complex and are followed according to a person's degree of observance. These laws are spelled out in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy in the Torah. Prohibited foods are those that may not be consumed in any form. They include all animals—and the products of animals—that do not chew the cud and do not have cloven hoofs (e.g., pigs and horses); fish without fins and scales; the blood of any animal; shellfish and all other living creatures that creep; certain fowl enumerated in the Bible. Moreover, meat and milk may not be eaten, cooked or stored together, based on a Biblical proscription against boiling a kid goat in its mother's milk. Following these rules is called "keeping kosher." Some observant Jews have two kitchens or two sets of pots and pans, one for dairy products, the other for meat. For the very orthodox, even fruits, vegetables and wine must be certified by a rabbi as kosher. During Passover, the restrictions are even more stringent and supermarkets that serve Jewish communities have special sections for Passover food. Some people may even have a separate kitchen for Passover food.

Islamic dietary laws are not as complex. Muslims share the Jewish ban on pork as well as the meat of carnivores and animals that died due to illness, injury, stunning, poisoning, or slaughtering not in the name of God. Alcohol is banned and some people also avoid shellfish. Forbidden foods are called haram; those that are allowed are halal. Verses in the Quran also

mention bananas, olives, dates pomegranates, figs and grapes as desirable foods.

A common but mistaken explanation is that the ban on eating pork was to prevent trichinosis. The anthropologist Mary Douglas defines forbidden and impure animals as those that are 'out of place' and deviate in some way from others in their category. [Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger*, (London and New York, 2007), p. 67] For example, birds without feathers, fish without scales or cloven-footed animals that do not chew the cud were forbidden to the Jews because they are anomalies, and therefore unclean. Pollution comes about when a category boundary is violated. Moreover, unlike many other forms of livestock, pigs are omnivorous scavengers, eating virtually anything they find. Another suggested reason is that such restrictions were a way of excluding those who do not belong to one's own group. Douglas argues that this was a way of protecting one's group from threats from below, especially since the higher a group's status, the more of a minority it must be.

Ancient Hindu texts called the Dharmashastras that were written several centuries BCE contain similar lists of forbidden animals and foods that are anomalies that do not fit into recognized categories — another example of how different societies handle concerns over cleanliness, purity, and classification.

In the past, Some Christians, especially Roman Catholics, avoided meat on Fridays and instead substituted fish. Although no longer an iron-class rule, it is still encouraged.



The Angel Prevents the Sacrifice of Isaac, Rembrandt van Rijn, 1636

Fasting

Another form of dietary restriction is fasting, which in one form or another is a part of almost every religion. Fasting, which can be seen as a substitute for the sacrifice, can take many forms: avoiding some foods, eating only certain foods, drinking but not eating,

up to total abstinence from all food and drink for varying periods — a day, several days, even several weeks.

Why do people fast? There are many reasons. It can be a form of worship, gratitude for a blessing, an instrument of self-discipline, or a method of physical cleansing. Some devotees believe fasting strengthens the mind and helps control desires. Others believe it brings spiritual insight. It can also be a way of atoning for one's bad actions.

Western Christians observe partial fasts during the forty days of Lent which commemorates Christ's 40-day vigil and fast in the desert before his crucifixion. Lent is sometimes called the "Great Fast." During this period Christians are meant to give up some comfort or adopt some spiritual practice that leads to self-examination, repentance from sin, and, ultimately, renewal of the soul. This can entail abstention from meat through the entire period or only on Ash Wednesday or Good Friday. A common method in the US is giving up one's favorite food during this period. Mormons are expected to fast one Sunday each month and to give the money that would have otherwise been spent on food to charity. The reason is to attain spiritual strength, closeness to God and preparation to receive His blessings.

Adherents of Eastern Christianity — Greek, South Slavic, and Russian Orthodoxy — follow stricter guidelines. They are supposed to avoid meat, fish, milk, and dairy products every Wednesday and Friday throughout the year. Abstaining from meat is a form of penance and a way of honoring Christ's sacrifice. There are also four canonical fasting periods. Fish and seafood are allowed during some fasts. According to Church tradition, fasting is a necessary tool in the believer's effort to limit sin — as far as possible and with the grace of God. However, these guidelines can be mitigated in case of age or illness, and church guidelines stress the importance of following the spirit of fasting and not torturing one's body.

Judaism has two major fast days. The first is

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, for which, God instructs the people of Israel, "You shall afflict your souls." The second is Tisha B'av which commemorates the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The fasts begin at sundown the previous night and end after sundown the next day. No food or drink is consumed. There are four more shorter fasts during the year. The act of fasting is believed to result in the spiritual transformation of the individual or the community. Fasting is claimed to influence God to act graciously toward Israel. Personal fasts are undertaken as a penance for sin.

Fasting is one of the five pillars of Islam that are mandatory for every Muslim. During the lunar month Ramadan, during which the Quran was revealed to the Prophet, all Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, smoking during daylight hours. The purpose of this fast is to encourage self-restraint, empathy for those who are hungry and gratitude for having food. Shia Muslims also fast on Ashura, a day that marks the martyrdom of Husayn ibn Ali and his family.



Celebrating a Hindu Puja at home



A Jain monk

Among Hindus, fasting practices vary greatly depending on region, caste, tradition and local customs. Fasting usually does not connote total abstention from food but rather a restricted way of eating. The dishes are always vegetarian. At its least rigorous, it may mean cooking dishes in pure ghee (clarified butter) instead of oil or replacing sea salt with rock salt. Sometimes only kaccha (e.g., boiled) foods are permitted. Meals might only be taken once a day in the morning or only after sunset. One of the most interesting fasts is called phalahar which means

eating only food from plants that that grow without special cultivation, e.g., wild grains, vegetables, certain roots and tubers, leaves, and flowers. For example, bread and snacks are made of dried water chestnut flour or lotus seed flour instead of wheat and other grains. This custom may have had its origins in the practices of the ancient ascetics who retreated into the forest and ate only what was available.

Some Hindus fast on certain days of the lunar cycle when the moon changes, especially the eighth and fourteenth day of each fortnight and on Tuesdays. Pious Hindus may fast for a full month during the month of Kartik. Communal fasts are associated with religious holidays such as Ram Navami, Mahashivratri and Janamasthami.

The Buddha initially practiced extreme forms of fasting but realized it prevented him from attaining enlightenment and abandoned strict asceticism in favor of the Middle Way, which calls for moderation in all things. Instead, he recommended practicing mindfulness while eating. A vegetarian diet is essential for monks and nuns living in monasteries but if someone gives meat to a Buddhist monk who is begging for food he is was expected to take it. Lay people are not required to be vegetarian. Today monks in China, Korea and Vietnam are strictly vegetarian. In Tibet, a cold country where vegetables are scarce, vegetarianism is rare and even the Dalai Lama on his doctor's advice eats meat.

Fasting and dietary restrictions play an important role in the theology and practice of Jainism, a religion with a few million adherents in India and abroad. Jainism is the world's only unconditionally vegetarian religion. [For a study of Jain foodways, see Sen, Colleen Taylor. 'Jainism: The World's Most Ethical Religion?' In *Food and Morality: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2007*, edited by Susan R. Friedland, 230–40. Totnes, Devon: Prospect Books, 2008]. Ahimsa—non injury to all life forms – is a cornerstone of Jain belief and extends not only to animals but to other forms of life. Jains not only do not eat meat, fish, or eggs, but avoid a myriad of other foods, including those whose production

kills the plant, harms microscopic organisms, or destroys the germs of future life. Thus, Jains avoid honey, fruits and vegetables that contain little seeds (eggplant, figs), underground roots (potatoes, carrots, onions) and mushrooms. Most Jains and many Hindus avoid eating onions and garlic which from ancient times were believed to inflame the passions. Milk and milk products are allowed but alcohol is forbidden. Jain monks and nuns follow every more stringent dietary restrictions. Jains do not eat after sunset lest they unknowingly kill an insect and Jain monks and nuns sweep the road before them as they wander around the countryside.

Jains consider fasts essential for spiritual growth. A fast is preceded by a vow, which means that it is a religious act and done with a predefined intention. Jain texts classify fasts into many categories and lay down complex rules about what can and cannot be eaten. It can entail drinking only water or triphala – water used to rinse out a pot used to cook food. A common form of fasting requires giving up green vegetables, milk, yogurt, oil, fruits, salt, spices and sugar and eating only dal and rice. The ultimate fast – *sallekhna* – entails giving up all food and starving oneself to death. It can be done only when a person is in final stage of fatal illness or is very old and has fulfilled duties in life and must receive permission from a senior ascetic.

Vegetarianism

Contrary to popular belief most Indians are not vegetarians. Vegetarianism varies widely by region and community. A survey by the Pew Research Center (2020) found that only twenty-nine per cent of Indian adults describe themselves as vegetarian [Corichi, Manolo. 'Eight-in-Ten Indians Limit Meat in their Diets, and Four-in-Ten Consider Themselves Vegetarian'. *Pew Research Center*, 8 July 2021] (The definition was left up to the respondent and the question asked was "Would you eat meat if it were available?"). The percentage varies greatly by religion: over ninety per cent of Jains say they are vegetarians,

compared with forty-four per cent of Hindus, eight per cent of Muslims and ten per cent of Christians. Even among groups with low rates of vegetarianism, many people restrict their meat consumption on certain days or under certain circumstances. While most Sikhs eat meat (but not beef or pork), members of certain sects are vegetarians, perhaps reflecting their Vaishnav pre-conversion origins.

In the states of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Kerala, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and West Bengal, less than five per cent of the population are vegetarian. The highest proportions of vegetarians are in Rajasthan (seventy-five per cent), Punjab and Haryana (sixty-nine per cent each), and Gujarat (sixty-one per cent). Vegetarianism tends to be more common among higher caste Hindus. However, geography and history also play a role. For example, West Bengal and Kerala have long seacoasts, so sea food plays an important part in their diets.

Beef is taboo for most Hindus; in fact, according to the Pew Research Center survey, a majority of Hindus (seventy per cent) say a person could not be considered a Hindu if they eat beef, compared with just under fifty per cent who say this would be true of people who do not believe in God or never offer prayers – indication of how important diet is to identity in India. [Corichi's book mentioned above]

Many explanations have been given for the prevalence of vegetarianism and avoidance of beef eating among Hindus. While signs can be detected even during Vedic times, when the sacrifice was the main form of worship, they came into full force with the rise of Jainism and Buddhism some time before the fifth century BCE. One explanation is the belief that eating meat disturbs the mind, making it impossible to achieve mental harmony. Cows are considered too valuable to slaughter for their meat and dairy is an important part of vegetarians' diet. Another explanation is that cows are regarded as family members, just as dogs are in many Western countries.



A Passover Seder plate



Vegetarian Food served at a Korean Buddhist temple

Vegetarianism has played a role in other religions which were influenced by Indian practices. St. Jerome (347 - 420 CE) defended vegetarianism and said that by showing the spiritual benefits of fasting Indian Brahmins should be emulated by Christians. St. Benedict, founder of the Benedictine order, laid down the rule that no four-footed animals should be eaten in monasteries. Today this tradition is still followed in some Western monastic orders as well as in Eastern Orthodox monasteries. On the other hand, at various points in history ecclesiastical powers-condemned vegetarianism as a heresy, citing biblical passages that God made animals for man's use; vegetarian sects such as the medieval Cathars were persecuted. In the present day, concerns for animal rights and the environment have encouraged spread of vegetarianism and veganism worldwide.



Tirupati laddoo featured on an Indian postage stamp.

Community Meals

Eating with others strengthens our sense of belonging and reinforces our personal identity. All religions observe certain days on which they commemorate, celebrate or even mourn certain events with food. It can be part of a family or communal meal or a religious ceremony. Christians typically celebrate their major holidays with special meals. In the U.S. this may be turkey for Christmas and ham or lamb for Easter (the lamb as a symbol of Jesus' sacrifice.)

Roman Catholics and adherents of Eastern Orthodoxy may have a meat-free meal on Christmas Eve before going to mass. Italians celebrate the Feast of the Seven Fishes, while

Polish Catholics celebrate Wigilia, which may have twelve dishes in honor of the twelve apostles. The centerpiece may be carp accompanied by mushrooms, breads and salads. In France a traditional end to a Christmas meal is the *buche de noel*, or Christmas log. Its origin dates back to around 1870, when a Parisian pastry maker was inspired by the Christmas eve ritual of burning a log in the fire — a tradition that can in turn be traced back to the winter solstice rituals of the ancient Celts.

In Judaism, an important meal is the Seder which starts the festival of Passover (Pesah) commemorating the deliverance of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage in the thirteenth century BCE. During the seven or eight days of Passover, all leaven (that is, yeast), whether in bread or other mixtures, is prohibited, and only unleavened bread, called *matzo*, may be eaten. This symbolizes both the Hebrews' suffering while in bondage and the haste with which they left Egypt.

The Seder meal that starts Passover is an occasion for each person to relive the exodus as a personal spiritual event and follows a carefully prescribed ritual during which the youngest child answers questions and the story of the Jews' Exodus from Egypt is retold. A centerpiece is the Seder plate which has five or sometimes six foods on it: a lamb shank bone and an egg, which commemorate the sacrifice once performed at the Temple in Jerusalem; a vegetable (cooked or raw) dipped into salt water, symbolizing the tears of Israeli slaves in Egypt; one or two bitter herbs, such as lettuce or horseradish, recalling the bitterness of slavery; and *haroset*, a sweet reddish or brown paste symbolizing the clay the slaves used to make the pyramids. Four glasses of wine are drunk at various points within the meal.

The actual Seder meal varies depending on the celebrants' traditions. Ashkenazi Jews, whose ancestors came from Eastern Europe, may serve gefilte fish (poached fish dumplings), *matzo ball soup*, brisket or roast chicken, potato *kugel*

(somewhat like a casserole) and *tzimmes*, a stew of carrots and prunes, sometimes with potatoes or sweet potatoes. Sephardic Jews, whose ancestors lived in North Africa and Iberia may enjoy humus, lentils, salads, and other Middle Eastern dishes.

Among Muslims, the end of Ramadan, called *Eid al Fitr*, is marked by a major feast. Each day's fast is broken with a meal known as "iftar." Traditionally, a date is eaten to break the fast. People gather with their families and enjoy lavish meals that reflect local traditions. Among South Asians, this meal may include *biryani* — dishes of spiced meat and rice — kebabs, *haleem*, chicken and sweets.

In most religions, food is not part of the religious service as such, nor is it served in the houses of worship, or at least not where the worship is conducted. However, some places of worship have become known for their culinary offerings. For example, some Buddhist temples and monasteries in Japan, Korea, China and South East Asia have become famous for their vegetarian cuisines.

In Hinduism, offering food to the presiding deity or deities of a temple and then distributing it to worshippers is a part of practices in certain traditions. Temple foods are usually, but not always, vegetarian and do not have onion or garlic or intense spicing. Sweets are a specialty of many temples.

A standard ritual is for the priest to offer food to the statue (*murti*) of the deity, then leave it in its presence to satisfy his or her spiritual hunger and, finally, distribute the food to the worshippers and pilgrims as *prasad* (a Hindi word that also means grace). They may eat it on the spot and/or take it home to share with family and friends. Many devotees feel spiritually uplifted simply by offering and receiving *prasad*.

Food may be prepared in communal kitchens that in the largest temples are staffed by hundreds of cooks and assistants [*Narayan, Shoba. Food and Faith A Pilgrims' Journey through India. Monee, IL: Jasmine Press, 2021*].

India's most famous temple food comes from the town of Udupi in Karnataka, home to many temples and monasteries. The specialty of the Udupi Sri Krishna monastery founded in the thirteenth century is dosa (a thin pancake made of ground and fermented lentils and rice) with a plain potato filling without onions. People sit on the floor of a large hall while young boys serve the food from giant containers onto banana leaves. In the last century, some of these cooks opened their own restaurants serving similar vegetarian food. This is the origin of South Indian restaurants that are popular around the world, some of which have names Udupi Palace.

The Sri Venkateswara temple in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh is the world's second most visited holy place after the Vatican. Its kitchen serves an average of 60,000 people daily and up to 200,000 during festivals. Its specialty is the iconic Tirupati laddu—sweet balls made of lentils, sugar, nuts and spices, including a giant version called kalyana laddu that weighs 500 grams. It is so iconic that it has been featured on an Indian stamp.

One of the most unusual food events is the Annakuta, or Mountain of Food, held annually at a temple in Mount Govardhan near Vrindavan at the end of the rainy season. It commemorates an event in the Krishna's childhood when he persuaded the local cowherds to make their annual offerings of harvest grains and pulses to Mount Govardhan

instead of to the god Indra. Angered, Indra punishes the people by sending a rainstorm, but Krishna shelters them by lifting the hill on his fingertip, a scene often depicted in Indian paintings. At the Swaminarayan Temple in Bartlett, Illinois, the congregants prepare over 2000 vegetarian dishes which they offer to the deity. They are an interesting combination of traditional Indian sweets and savories and American treats such as cupcakes, pizza, and apple turnovers.

Sikh temples, called gurudwaras, provide free meals to people from all communities, a practice known as langar. The food is always vegetarian, making it accessible to everyone. The Golden Temple in Amritsar feeds an average of 50,000 people a day, double that number on festive days. There are two kitchens: one that prepares dal and the other where rotis are assembled. The langar has its origin at Sufi shrines (dargahs). Sufism is a form of Islamic mysticism that emphasizes introspection and spiritual closeness with God. The distribution of food at these shrines is considered a tribute to the saint honoured there as well as a gift from the saint and ultimately from God.

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A Stanza from the "Song of Sannyasin" by Swami Vivekananda

*Have thou no home. What home can hold thee, friend?
The sky thy roof, the grass thy bed; and food
What chance may bring, well cooked or ill, judge not.
No food or drink can taint that noble Self
Which knows Itself. Like rolling river free
Thou ever be, Sannyâsin bold! Say—
"Om Tat Sat, Om!"*



At Joyrambati Ma Sarada Devi used to sit in this pose when she oversaw her devotee-children having prasad.



Easter and the Lenten Journey in the Catholic Tradition (Part 2)

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After Jesus of Nazareth died, his body was buried in a tomb nearby the crucifixion site. After three days, Mary Magdalene, whom we acknowledge as “Apostle to the Apostles,” came to the tomb to anoint his body as was the custom of the time. She found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. Here is the first eye-witness account we find in the Gospels. The Gospel of John chapter 20.

“¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look [a] into the tomb, ¹²and she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, [b] if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, [c] “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, “Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and she told them that he had said these things to her.”

An important reason for why Christians throughout the centuries have believed this to be

true is that at the time, in first century Palestine, the witness of women was not considered to be credible in a court of law. Therefore, to have all four Gospels claim Mary’s witness and that she told the other disciples was extraordinary. It had to be true for it would not be something the Gospel writers made up to make a point. They knew such a claim would not be believed unless it were the truth. We see that Mary saw Jesus physically although she did not recognize him right away. (What does a resurrected body look like? Especially one you were not expecting to see?) She did not recognize him until she heard him call her by her name. Jesus calls us by our name.

Just following Mary’s witness in the Gospel of John is Jesus’ appearance to the disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem where they were hiding for fear of persecution. From John chapter 20:

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, [for fear of the Jews,] Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Here, and in another passage as well, we learn that Jesus mysteriously appeared to the disciples although the doors were shut and locked. They could see the wounds from his crucifixion in his hands and feet. So, Jesus is appearing – miraculously.

Other post-resurrection accounts of Jesus in the Gospels include his appearing, not being recognized, then recognized, and disappearing. In Luke's Gospel chapter 24 we see once again that **Jesus** appeared to two disciples as they walked along the road to Emmaus, a village about seven miles from Jerusalem.

¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, **Jesus himself came near and went with them,** ¹⁶ **but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.** ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" ¹⁹ He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, (and they went on to explain Jesus' crucifixion and death, and about women who saw his empty tomb and Mary Magdalene seeing him alive)... ²⁵ Then he (**Jesus**) said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he (**Jesus**) interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. ... ³⁰ When he (**Jesus**) was (later at table) with them, he took bread, blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then **their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight.** ³² They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem, ... ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road and how he (**Jesus**) had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread."

Other post-resurrection appearances of Jesus in the Gospels have him cooking fish for the disciples for breakfast on the shores of the Sea of Galilee...

John chapter 21...

⁴ Early in the morning, **Jesus** stood on the shore, but **the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.** ⁵ He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. ⁶ He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish... ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. ¹⁰ **Jesus** said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." ... ¹² **Jesus** said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ **Jesus** came, took the bread, and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

We also have testimony of encountering Jesus written in Acts of the Apostles, chapter 9. And this encounter is different.

³ As he (Saul) neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am **Jesus**, whom you ⁷are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they **heard the sound but did not see anyone.** ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing. So, they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind and did not eat or drink anything. ¹² In a vision he (Saul) has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." ...¹⁷... (In Damascus) Placing his hands on Saul, he (Ananias) said, "Brother Saul, the Lord — **Jesus**, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell

from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength."

Saul then changed his name to Paul. We see he had a powerful mystical encounter with Jesus that changes his life. He hears the voice of Jesus and then falls to the ground. He begins to understand that Jesus is alive and is alive in his followers, those who believe and are members of what we call the Body of Christ. He stops his persecution of the followers of **Jesus** and begins proclaiming the Risen Lord. He builds up the communities of the first Christians. Paul ultimately dies as a martyr in Rome.

There are other accounts in Scripture that reveal both a physical appearance of Jesus or a hearing of his voice, experiencing his presence, and his absence. A physical and mystical knowing of the resurrection of **Jesus**, the Christ.

And so, our highest feast day, Easter, marks and celebrates the mystery of the *Risen Christ*. In the centuries since, there have been many mystical appearances of **Jesus** as testified by saints in the Catholic Church and others. In my interreligious encounters I have had people of other religions come up to me and say, 'Oh, you are a Christian! We know **Jesus**! He comes to us when we are in meditation. We see him."

Ultimately, Catholics are people of faith today because more than two thousand years ago – something happened. Followers of **Jesus** had physical and mystical encounters with him. As Paul said, "I no longer live but Christ lives in me." Galatians 2:20.

The resurrection of **Jesus** is not an historical fact that can be proven. The proof is that more than two thousand years later he still animates our lives. We believe we encounter him, alive in our hearts in ways that change us and in ways that have changed the world. Faith is not a fact. It is religious experience alive. **Jesus** alive in our hearts is not someone to grasp, to hold onto, as he told Mary Magdalene in the garden. We may ask then,

why? Why did he come, live a human life only to suffer most horribly and die? Why then the resurrection?

In John's Gospel chapter 8 **Jesus** says¹² ... "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." **Jesus** came to show us who we are and whose we are. **Jesus** says to us "You are the light of the world." (Matt 5:14). We are created in an outpouring of divine love. When we fully embrace the enormity of the love given to us, we are 'saved' from our sins, our 'missing the mark.' We live in the saving grace of the one who suffered, died, and rose from the dead for our sins.

After the many resurrection appearances of **Jesus**, one even to a crowd of more than 500 (1 Corinthians 15:6). Scripture tells us **Jesus** ascended into heaven, Luke chapter 24⁵⁰ "When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them.⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven." And Acts of the Apostles chapter 1: "⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight."

The death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, is what we refer to as the Paschal Mystery, the cornerstone of Christian belief. We proclaim 'Alleluia!' in our masses and liturgies, marking a resounding joy of the outpouring of love divine that saves us. And we await the Second coming of *Christ* foretold in Scripture.

In Acts chapter 1, we find two men 'in white' (often a sign of angels) speaking to the apostles after **Jesus** "⁹ ... was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky?"

This same **Jesus**, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

What is it that Christians are truly awaiting? Will Jesus really come back to earth on a cloud? Many believe so. And the mystery of our faith continues. Many believe and talk about the Second Coming as the coming of the consciousness of *Christ* within all of humanity. When we live into the Divine Love that is within us, we begin to awaken our consciousness to the *Christ within*. As **Jesus** tells us ‘Remain in me as I remain in you.’ (John 15:4) we know that there is a mutual indwelling of Divine Love, the love that permeates all of Creation. The very same love that was poured out FOR us is IN us.

Jesus tells us that the kingdom of God is within us. ²⁰Once, on being asked (by the Pharisees) when the kingdom of God would come, **Jesus** replied, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, ²¹nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.” (Luke 17).

Christ Consciousness is living so that we may BE THE LOVE WE HAVE RECEIVED. To love all. To serve all. As the Body of Christ. In the Gospel of Matthew chapter 25 **Jesus** says to his followers: ³⁵... I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and

welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.’

I would like to end by sharing with you a passage from the Gospel of John chapter 21. It is the last appearance of the Resurrected Jesus to the disciples. They are on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

¹⁵When they had finished eating, **Jesus** said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” **Jesus** said, “Feed my lambs.” ¹⁶Again **Jesus** said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” **Jesus** said, “Take care of my sheep.” ¹⁷The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because **Jesus** asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” **Jesus** said, “Feed my sheep ¹⁹... Then (**Jesus**) said to him (Peter), “Follow me!”... ²⁵ (And the Gospel concludes) ‘**Jesus** did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.”

Jesus came to show us who we are, and how we are to live, as he did. He came not to be served but to serve. We are to do likewise. **Jesus** asks us, ‘do you love me?’ When we love **Jesus**, we follow in his footsteps as we love and serve one another.

Thank you.



BHAGAVATA (18): HOW CAN MAN ACQUIRE SPIRITUAL MERITS

Swami Ishatmananda

In the third book of the Bhagavatam, we learned about the wonderful spiritual conversation between Devahuti (daughter of Swayambhu Manu and the wife of Kardama Muni) and her son Kapila.

In the 29th chapter, we find Devahuti wanted to know about devotion (*bhakti*) and Kapila said: “When by the mere hearing about Me, the Supreme God, the mind of an individual streams forth, unmotivated (*nirvoasana*), unrestricted (*nirantara*) and one-pointed (*ekagra*) towards Me, who is present in all beings – that love is *bhakti*.”

Bhakti has three different forms:

Tamasika Bhakti: Worship with cruel purposes – vengeance, jealousy, and other low propensities.

Rajasika Bhakti: Worship of images with an intention to fulfill worldly enjoyments, wealth, fame, etc.

Svattvika Bhakti: Worship for liberation from the bondage of Karmas.

Some *svattvika* devotees do not accept even the five forms of *moksha* (liberation), namely:

Salokya (living in the sphere of God),

Srashti (having God’s power),

Samipyta (living close to God),

Sarupya (having a form similar to God), and

Sayujya (being one with God)

The only thing they desire is the opportunity to serve God. A beautiful story from the Ramayana illustrates this state of a *svattvika* devotee.

While traveling through the forests during an exile of fourteen years, Sri Rama, along with his wife Sita Devi, and brother Lakshmana reached the bank of river Sarayu. The local tribal chief, Guhaka, which Sri Rama considered his friend, carefully observed and arranged everything that was needed for Sri Rama’s stay at that place. The next day, Sri Rama’s party of three will cross the river, Sarayu. Guhaka asked the boatmen who

wanted to volunteer.

Kayat, an experienced boatman, offered his service with the condition that all other boats should be removed from the embankment so that Sri Rama would not have any other option but to use his boat.

The next day morning, Sri Rama, along with Lakshmana and Sita came to cross the river and found only Kayat’s boat there. Lakshmana got suspicious – why only one boat? Where are the others? Sri Rama smiled and said what does it matter? Let us cross the river without further delay.

As they approached the boat on foot, Kayat lifted Sri Rama in his arms and carried him towards the boat. Lakshmana was enraged at the sight and wanted to object. Sri Rama stopped Lakshmana and asked Kayat the reason behind his strange gesture. Kayat explained: there’s a story that when Sri Rama’s feet touched the stone at the ashrama of sage Gautama, that stone took the human form of Ahalaya, sage Gautama’s wife. If the mere touch of Sri Rama’s feet can transform a stone into a woman, what might happen if those holy feet touch Kayat’s boat? The boat being his only means of earning a living, he didn’t want to take the chance of that taking human form by the touch of Rama’s feet.

As the boat sailed, instead of traveling towards the other shore, it started making rounds in the middle of the river. The unnecessary delay again enraged Lakshmana, and he exclaimed at Kayat, enquiring the reason for delaying their journey. Kayat replied: the Lord makes our soul (*Jivatman*) take one birth after the other, making rounds in this circle of Samsara. The Lord never allows the soul to merge into the Super Soul (*Paramatman*) directly, instead delays the process. Now getting the opportunity, Kayat reciprocated by treating

Lord Rama similarly, hindering him from reaching the other shore. Sri Rama smiled, seeing the intense devotion of Kayat.

When they finally reached the other shore of river Sarayu, Kayat lifted Sri Rama in his arms again. Noticing Kayat's audacity, Lakshmana became unstoppable in anger. But Sri Rama calmly stopped Lakshmana and explained that Kayat was a tortoise in his previous birth and a devotee of Lord Vishnu.

As a tortoise, when he reached Vaikuntha, the abode of Vishnu, he wanted to touch the feet of Lord Vishnu who was half-laying in the seat of the divine serpent Shesha-naag. Goddess Lakshmi was then serving Lord Vishnu, by messaging his feet and prevented the tortoise from approach the Lord and the Lord took pity on his helpless devotee. That same tortoise now took rebirth as Kayat and by the grace of Lord Vishnu Kayat could recognize Lord Rama as the divine incarnation of Vishnu. The Lord granted the devotee's intense desire to touch His lotus feet.

By this power of devotion, *jiva* overcomes the three *gunas* of Prakriti.

How can one develop such devotion? In the Bhagavatam, we find ways to develop intense devotion.

1. Perform your duty with detachment *nishevita nimittena svadharmena mahiyasha* (3/29/15)

2. Worship Me by installing my Image in a holy place. My presence in all beings should be recognized. *bhuteshu matbhavanaya sattvena asangamena cha* (3/29/16)

3. Show respect for holy people *mahata bahumanena* Help people who are in distress, *dinanam anukampa*.

When Swami Vivekananda (then young Naren) used the expression "Show compassion to the poor," Sri Ramakrishna corrected him by saying, "Who are you to show compassion?" And introduced the word service, "We can only serve the poor." Equals should be treated with friendliness. *Maitrachaiva atmatulyeshu* (3/29/17)

Control of mind & senses: *Yamena niyamena cha* (3/29/17)

4. Study of scripture, practice of Japa, straightforwardness, and self-less attitude should be cultivated also should have holy company (3/29/18). By practicing these qualities, one will gain purity of mind and will be absorbed in Me.

3rd Skanda 29th chapter verses 21- 27, we find the best teachings of Bhagavata- given by Kapila

*Aham sarveshu bhuteshu bhutatma avasthitah sada
Tvam avagyaya mang marte kurute
archavirambanam.* 3/29/21

I reside in all beings as their innermost soul. Disregarding My presence within them, people worship My Image in vain.

*Yoh mam sarveshu bhuteshu santuh atmanam
ishwaram*

Hitva archa bhajate -- bhasmanyeva bhuhati sah.
3/29/22

If one disregard Me present in all as their soul and Lord but ignorantly offers worship only to images, such worship is as ineffective as sacrificial offerings made in ashes.

When a person is *manina* (proud), *vadha-vairasya* (feeling animosity toward others) *bhinnadarshina* (having other ideas) *na manah shantimichati* (will never attain peace of mind).

If a man disregards and persecutes fellow beings but worships Me in images with numerous rituals and rich offerings, I am not pleased with him.

Then the great sage, Kapila, pronounced

*Sarvabhuteshu avasthita mam suhridi yavad na veda
tavad swakarmakrit archadau archayet.* 3/29/25

So long one realizes My presence in all beings, one should continue practicing own duty (with detachment), worship (with devotion and with discrimination too).

In the verses from 28th through 35th the greatness of human being has been described beginning with Superior to gross matter are beings endowed with life, human is superior among those. Among humans who study Veda are superior. But one who realizes all-pervading God is present in all beings as Jiva (indwelling Soul) is the best.

Ishvaro jivo kalaya probishto bhagavaniti (3/29/34).

Introduction to the Cover Page :: Food For Thought

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Taittiriya Upanishad says:

*Aham annam, Aham annam, Aham annam
Ahamannādo 'hamannādo āhamannādaḥ
aham ślokakṛdaham ślokakṛdaham ślokakṛt*

I am the food, I am the food, I am the food.

I am the eater of the food, I am the eater of the
food, I am the eater of the food.

I am the maker of the verses (poet), I am the maker
of the verses.

Through these verses *kartā* (subject) and *karma* (object) are linked by *karanam*, means. In all these, I am, all the three factors (*triputi*) of subject, object and the experience. I am *nirvoikalpa* that is the absolute I beyond name and form is appearing as *savikalpa* creation that is the I with body and mind.

Vedanta taught us that this created body is made of five sheaths. The very first one is the *annamaya kosha* (gross body), which is made of *anna* or food. All living beings are formed from food. They sustain and grow on food. The body-mind-bound soul feels "*annam Brahma*" – food is Brahman or God.

Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly said, "*He whom you address as Brahma is none other than She whom I call Mother. Mother is a very sweet name.*" Tantra and Shakti worship are rooted in this concept of seeing the Divine as feminine. Sri Ramakrishna completed his tantric practices around the year 1863. During this practice Sri Ramakrishna had the visions of various forms of the Divine Mother. Each of Her forms was of extraordinary beauty, Sri Ramakrishna said later that they were not worth comparison in that respect with that of Sri Rajarajeshwari, otherwise called Shodasi. He said, "*I saw in a vision the beauty of the person of Shodasi which melted, and spread all around illumining the quarters.*" This particular form of Divine Mother he

chose to worship, almost 10 years after of his tantric sadhana, in Sri Sarada Devi. It was the night of either June 5, 1872 or May 25, 1873.

This is actually the worship of Divine Mother Kālī and popularly known as "Phalahārini Kālī Puja". This festival typically falls on the new moon night of Baishakh (May/June). The word *phala* represents both result and fruit. Indian summer comes with many fruits, such as, mango, jackfruit, lichi, java plum (*jāmun*) along with apple, grapes, banana etc. that are available all year. Mother's devotees worship Her with all fruits and lovingly call Her *Phalahārini Kālī*.

On this day Mother Kālī is worshipped as Shodashi or Tripurasundari or Lalita – an embodiment of beauty, grace, and divine love. Goddess Shodashi manifests Herself as a sixteen year old form of the Divine Mother. It is believed that through Her worship one attains the fulfillment of desires -- both material and spiritual.

The night in Dakshineswar when Sri Ramakrishna did this worship, Sri Sarada Devi came from her place of dwelling (Nahabat) to the Master's room. Following this, on this day an image of Mother is brought and placed in the inner shrine of Belur Math, where Sri Ramakrishna resides. At the end of the worship Sri Ramakrishna surrendered all the results (*phala*) of his sadhanas, his rosary along with his self, forever at the lotus feet of the Devi and saluted her.

Through Mother-worship Sri Ramakrishna awakened, as Vivekananda said, the '*Brahma-kundalini*' in the modern times. By this he probably meant that the great flood of spirituality which the Master brought in his own life, influenced the entire humanity. Naturally it has a special significance in the Ramakrishna tradition.

This year in May many centers of the Ramakrishna Order observed Phalahārini Kālī puja. On the cover a photograph of this celebration can be seen that took place a couple of years ago at the Belur Math. There were fruits (though not seen in the photo) and also cooked foods along with various types desserts. Traditionally monks before taking food chant a verse from the Bhagavad Gita, that says, “*Brahman is the ritual, Brahman is the offering, Brahman is the one who offers to the fire that is Brahman. If one sees Brahman in every action one will find Brahman.*” It is the same as the saying of Ramaprasad, a great mystic-worshiper of the Divine Mother: “*When you take food, think as if you are offering an oblation to Mother Shyāma.*”

Divine Mother Shyāma Kālī is worshipped on the new moon night of the month of Kartik (October/November). On the previous day, that is on the fourteenth day of the dark half, many Bengalis observe *bhoota* or *naraka* (hell) *chaturdashi*. One of the traditions associated with this celebration is the practice of taking 14 different types of greens or herbs. This ritual is known as *choddo shāk* (fourteen greens). The specific types of greens used can vary from region to region, but commonly used greens include neem leaves, tulsi (holy basil), durva grass, bael (stone apple) leaves, and the like. The idea is: these greens with their medicinal and purifying properties would help one to conquer the hell of negative energies, diseases, and evil influences.

The English word "food" originated from the Germanic word *fōda*, which means nourishment or sustenance. The word evolved and became food in modern English, referring to substances consumed to provide energy, nutrients, and nourishment to living organisms. There are two Sanskrit words that are equivalent to food.

In Sanskrit, *āhāra* refers to the act of bringing or taking in food, nourishment, or sustenance as it derives from the root *āhr* which means to bring, take, or fetch. Another word *khādya* specifically refers to edible substances or things that are eaten. It directly relates to the act of consuming food and

emphasizes the aspect of being edible or suitable for consumption. Swami Vivekananda writes, “*Shankarācharya has said that the word Ahāra there means “objects of the senses”, whereas Shri Rāmānuja has taken the meaning of Ahāra to be “food”. In my opinion we should take that meaning of the word which reconciles both these points of view.*”

An ancient scripture of traditional medicine that encompasses a holistic approach to health and well-being, focusing on the balance and harmony of the mind, body, and spirit is Ayurveda. It originated in India over 5,000 years ago. In this scripture food is considered an essential component of maintaining health and preventing diseases. It recognizes that different types of food have distinct qualities and effects on the body and mind.

There are some common points all religious traditions share regarding food, as it is considered an integral part of spiritual practice and not just a source of physical sustenance. Food possesses the vital life force (*prāna*), or energy. The quality of the food, the manner of its preparation, and the mindset while eating are believed to affect the *pranic* energy one receives from it.

In general all religions encourage having the *Sāttvika* food. It is considered pure, clean, and conducive to spiritual well-being and believed to promote clarity, harmony, and tranquility of mind. It includes fresh fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy products, nuts, and seeds, prepared with simplicity and minimal use of spices and oils.

Fasting is also a common spiritual practice in all religious traditions and is observed on specific days, during festivals, or as a form of penance. Fasting is believed to purify the body and mind, increase self-control, and enhance spiritual awareness. It is often accompanied by prayers, meditation, and reflection, allowing individuals to focus on their spiritual journey.

All religions emphasize the sacredness of food, the importance of mindful consumption, and the connection between physical nourishment and spiritual well-being. Swami Vivekananda

cautioned, *“There are certain kinds of food that produce a certain change in the mind; we see it every day. There are other sorts which produce a change in the body, and in the long run have a tremendous effect on the mind. It is a great thing to learn; a good deal of the misery we suffer is occasioned by the food we take. You find that after a heavy and indigestible meal it is very hard to control the mind; it is running, running all the time. There are certain foods which are exciting; if you eat such food, you find that you cannot control the mind. It is obvious that after drinking a large quantity of wine, or other alcoholic beverage, a man finds that his mind would not be controlled; it runs away from his control.”*

Food is a unifying force that connects all living beings and should not be a factor in creating a divide among people. And whenever, there is a discontent arising out of certain food practices and choices, Swamiji’s suggestion is: *“We leave everybody free to know, select, and follow whatever suits and helps him. Thus, for example, eating meat may help one, eating fruit another. Each is welcome to his own peculiarity, but he has no right to criticise the conduct of others, because that would, if followed by him, injure him, much less to insist that others should follow his way.”*

The act of sharing and offering food is seen as an expression of unity, hospitality, and equality. It is encouraged to share meals with others, perform acts of charity by feeding the needy, and treat all beings with respect and compassion.

The concepts of the body and blood of God are significant in Christian rituals, particularly in the sacrament of the Eucharist or Holy Communion. During this sacrament, believers partake in the consecrated bread and wine, which are regarded as the body and blood of Christ. Though the interpretation and significance of these terms can vary among different Christian denominations and theological perspectives, yet in general it is seen as a participation in the life and sacrifice of Jesus, representing the believer's union with God and the nourishment of their spiritual life.

A closer look at the Durga Saptashati, where the

glory of the Divine Mother is sung, also teaches us the same. Mother is there always – at all times. Even when one says there is nothing, even at that time it is only Mother who is perceived in the form of nothingness. She is the substratum of all opposite qualities and cannot be denied. As Sri Sarada Devi said sweetly about herself -- she is the “Mother of all”.

In Durga Saptashati there is a mention about Goddess Shākambhari, who is associated with nourishment -- both physical and spiritual. This manifestation of the Divine Mother is also associated with abundance, harvest and vegetation. The name “Shākambhari” is derived from two Sanskrit words: “shāka,” meaning leafy greens, and “ambhari,” meaning one who provides or supports. Hindu mythology says that when a severe drought afflicted the earth, causing a famine and deprivation of food, the gods approached Mother Shākambhari to help alleviate the suffering. In response, she transformed herself into a manifestation of the Earth and produced an abundance of fruits, vegetables, and grains to feed all living beings. Shākambhari is often depicted with multiple arms, carrying various fruits, vegetables, and agricultural tools. When mother nature begets various types of greens, at that time devotees observe *Shākambhari Navaratri* -- nine nights in honor of Divine Mother.

In the fifth chapter of the book, gods praised the Divine Mother Aparājitā, the unconquerable one, referring Her unique qualities. After each quality they mentioned, salutations were offered four times from the: physical or gross body level or *ādhibhautika* level, subtle body or *ādhidāivika* level, causal body or *ādhyātmika* level, and from the transcendental state that is beyond all three bodies. Swami Vivekananda noticed, *“As these bodies become more and more finely organised, as the Tamoguna becomes the Rajoguna, and as the Rajoguna becomes Sattvaguna, more and more of this power and purity becomes manifest, and therefore it is that our people have been so careful about eating and drinking, and the food question.”*

Likewise, liberation, too, can be categorized in four types: *Sālokya* that is the state with or light (*ālōka*). When one reaches to the light of Consciousness transcending the inert body-mind identity, they attain *sālokya* liberation. The individual consciousness is founded on a collective consciousness. When one comes close (*samīpa*) to that collective consciousness that is *sāmīpya* liberation. When the aspirant arrives to the causal state from which all the forms are created, s/he attain the essential nature of the Divine Mother and that is *sārūpya* liberation. Finally the state when the individual soul becomes one with the Divine -- that connected-combined state -- is the *sāyuya* liberation.

Nirgunā form of Mother is called Vishnumāyā -- the eternal all-pervading potential power with omnipresent divine consciousness, *chetanā*. In this creation She is an embodiment of “*Rasa*”, the source of bliss. The word is composed of two letters ‘*ra*’ which means ‘to give’ and ‘*sa*’ which means ‘motion’. The use of *rasa* is as old as the Vedas though in all the four Vedas the meaning of *rasa* is interpreted in different ways. In his article on *Natyashastra*, N.Rama Chandra listed: In the Rg-Veda *rasa* means ‘water’, ‘juice of plant’, ‘liquor’, ‘drink’, ‘sap’. In Yajur-Veda it means ‘joy’. In Sama-Veda it means ‘liquor’. In Arthva-Veda it means ‘sap of herbs’, ‘sap of grain’. In Shatapatha Brāhama the meaning of *rasa* is interpreted as ‘honey’, ‘syrup’, ‘elixir’, ‘mixture’, ‘juice’. Mention of *rasa* in Brhadaranyaka Upanishad is found and it means ‘water’, ‘essential element’, ‘vital part’. The milk of cow is generally called *gorasa*. *Rasa* is also an organic unity. It is like (i) Multi-taste spice (condiment) (ii) Herbs (iii) Sweet substance (iv) Basic food.

When the Mother who is stainless and free from all qualities manifests Herself as *rasa* in all beings and “watches” everything, experiences and feels everything -- then She is described as the Mother with attributes. At one state of spiritual practice the aspirant realizes *rasa* (the taste), *rasika* (taster), and *rasya* (the process of tasting) are one.

This practice of oneness can be done through *buddhi* or intellect. *Buddhi* is that which is beyond word and so-called mind and when it becomes pure it is capable of making firm resolution about the absolute Truth at the level of individual consciousness. For ages devotees prayed through the *Gāyatri* mantra, “*We meditate on the adorable glory of the radiant sun; May She inspire our intelligence (dhī)*” [Tr. S. Radhakrishnan]. The power of intellect is a manifestation of Divine Mother. Chandogya Upanishad says, “*āhāra* (food) *śuddhau* (purity) *sattva* (intellect) *śuddhi*” purity of food begets purity of intellect.

Not only during the waking state or at the gross body level, but also at the time of sleep when the body is dreaming, the subtle body continues to get fed by the subtle elements. During dreamless sleep is an immobile state of consciousness in which the sense of existence is sensed as: “*I do not know anything*”. Here the Mother only exists in the form of ignorance. Activities of mind and sense organ are kept off. The essential nature of this sleep form is a veiled expression of all types of emotions. Patanjali named this state as *pratyā-abalambana vritti*. One receives full rest in Mother when She is manifested through this form of a single thought, *pratyaya*. However, the quality and duration of sleep depends on food that is taken in the gross level.

It is only the Divine Mother who resides in all beings as the desire to consume food. To overcome weaknesses one feels the need to have food, that is, hunger. Each sheath of a body, even each sense organs, experiences the need of having food. The food for the vital energy sheath is the life force, for the mind sheath it is thought, for the intellectual sheath it is knowledge, and for the bliss sheath it is joy. Life after life souls are going through suffering and pain. Still, the desire, the endless hunger to enjoy the world – never gets satiated. By rightly realizing this hunger form of the Divine Mother and offering salutations to Her wholeheartedly, one gets liberated from starvation and hunger for worldliness. The One who exists as the cause of

the revealer of hunger, and attaining whom all types of hunger get satiated that *Sat-Chit-Ananda* is Mother.

During the Baranagore Math period the direct disciples Sri Ramakrishna had to live a very austere life due to lack of funds. On some days, along with rice and salt the other item that helped these young monks to survive was boiled scarlet gourd (*telakuchā*) leaves. Swami Vivekananda wrote later, “*The austerities of that period were enough to dismay supernatural beings, not to speak of men.*” Mother Shākambhari comes in the form of leafy greens, and Mother Annapurnā is associated with rice.

Mother Annapurnā is specifically associated with food, nourishment, and sustenance for all living beings. She is depicted holding a ladle and a bowl of food, symbolizing her role as the giver of food and sustenance and is worshipped for blessings related to the availability and quality of food, as well as the satisfaction of hunger. The main temple of Annapurnā is in Varanasi, city of Lord Vishwanath Shiva. Annapurnā is worshipped on various occasions though the main day comes on the eighth day of spring Navaratri.

Annapurnā's domain extends beyond physical nourishment to the nourishment of the mind and soul. Achārya Shankara begged for “Knowledge (*jnāna*) and dispassion (*vairāgya*)” from this divine form. The one, who sees the divine presence and Annapurnā's blessings in every morsel consumed attains absolute contentment, and spiritual sustenance along with bodily sustenance.

As long as there is body, there will be its *chhāyā* or the shadow. Divine Mother is called as *chhāyā*, too. Shankarāchārya indicated another meaning of it – the individual soul (*Jīva*). It also means reflection (*pratibimba*). Reflection endowed with consciousness is *Jīva* and it is of three types body: gross, subtle, and causal. The subtle body of this conscious-reflection is made of five organs of perception, five organs of actions, five vital forces (*prāṇa*) while its causal form is the conscious-reflection of ignorance on the causal body. As the

regular shadow serves as a cover to an object, likewise the reflection of individual soul also keeps the absolute Self covered. Through the worship of Divine Mother this covering of ego gets removed. Once the ego is gone, the *Jīva* cannot be sensed as a separate existence. There is no individuality of reflection. It is to be realized that the existence of an image lies in the reality of the object. The only way to rightly understand that only Self exists, is to be able see the reflection (*chhāyā*) – that is to see Mother in all beings. The wise one sees this creation as truly as a reflection. In Vedanta it is termed as superimposition, false and the like. In Gita it is said, God alone resides in the heart of all. If a reflection of an inert object falls on another unconscious object – then they together cannot behave as a sentient one. Therefore, Mother being Consciousness by Her very essential nature, body-mind-intellect and all being Her reflection behave as conscious entities. Mother Herself is the Self, that's why the inert body is capable of identifying itself with a “I” with ego.

Though only reflected consciousness, this body is nothing but a manifestation *shakti* – power, energy, force. These terms are interconnected. Gravitational forces are related to potential energy. Forces can do work on objects transferring energy and changing their states. Being made of food, it is just food converted to calories -- units of energy. Powers, of all sense organs -- to see, to listen etc. keep the body alive. An alive body is nothing but that which is capable of transferring energy from one form to another. All atoms and molecules are being held by some forces and are being manifested as this body. Divine Mother is the eternal One, the center of ultimate energy of creation, preservation and destruction expressing Herself through three energies: *iccā śakti* (power of will) *jnāna śakti* (power of knowledge), and *kriyā śakti* (power of action).

Agni or fire too expresses energy. In Durga Suktam the Divine Mother is described as Jātaveda – a form of fire. The concept of fire, specifically the digestive fire, is of importance in Ayurveda. It is

responsible for breaking down food and extracting nutrients. Maintaining a balanced *agni* is crucial for optimal digestion and overall well-being.

The practices of yoga and tantra involve the awakening of the Kundalini energy. The chakra system is an integral part of these practices and is believed to be associated with the energetic centers within the body that influence different aspects of our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. For example, the *manipura* or the navel chakra is associated with the digestive system.

A body-bound individual soul feels the will power – both good or bad – as waves of desires constantly arise in the form of the thirst for sensual enjoyments at the very gross level. Individual beings constantly perceive Divine Mother's *tr̥ṣṇā* or craving form. It is through this form She keeps Her play of creation running.

For millions of lifetimes body-bound souls are trying to quench the thirst. As the *pratītya-samutpāda* of Buddhist philosophy talks about interdependence and causality, and describe how all phenomena arise in dependence upon other phenomena, without any inherent or independent existence. The understanding of dependent origination leads to the realization of the impermanence and emptiness of all phenomena, and the ultimate goal of liberation from suffering and rebirth. Buddha identified the cravings for any worldly thing, *tanhā* as the direct cause that makes one to come again and again in the cycle of birth and death. To go outside of the cycle of creation, it is necessary to realize Mother's pure form that exists beyond all desires. For example, Buddha was free from the craving for food. He took the excellent food of Sujata's rice pudding and accepted meat from Chunda with same calmness. He attained *Bodhi* or absolute Knowledge after taking the first one and received *nirvāna* or the final liberation from the body after consuming the second.

Buddha could transcend desire and that led him to the divine quality of forgiveness, which is associated with Mother's *kṣānti* form. He forgave

Chunda. The word *kṣānti* also represents patience, forbearance, endurance, indulgence, and a state of saintly abstraction. It is necessary to develop these qualities to make a positive impact in this created universe and for one's own mental and emotional well-being.

Another wonderful example is seen in Sri Sarada Devi's life. Ramlal, the nephew of Sri Ramakrishna, asked the management of the Dakshinswar temple to stop her pension after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna. This caused her to live a tremendously poverty-stricken life. But she endured all. She, the embodiment of *kṣānti*, manifested herself in glory through this incident. Sri Sarada Devi could forgive all because she experienced the diverse nature of this creation.

That, being eternal, manifesting through varied names and forms, that is called the *jāti* form of the Divine Mother. The word *jāti* is connected with *Jāta*, meaning, that which is born or created. The creation is made of different types of race, species, class, caste, genus, nature, property, and therefore all these represent *jāti*. Mother is eternal and so is Her *jāti* form. Depending on time-space-and-condition it can be modified but cannot become non-existing. Even foods and drinks can be categorized in various ways. In Bhagavad Gita Sri Krishna talked about the qualities of food and how those can affect the spiritual transformation of an aspirant.

The complementary part of forgiveness, *kṣānti* is *lajjā* that is modesty, grace, or anything that restrains one from being perverse, disordered, and licentious. These qualities help one to develop respect for one's own body image, which in turn involves accepting and appreciating oneself as one is, including one's body shape and size. And healthy eating habits being there. A healthier attitude towards food and a focus on nourishing the body is more important than striving for unrealistic ideals. As the word *lajjā* is related to the concept of honor or dignity, therefore, in addition to its literal meaning, it is used in a figurative sense to denote a sense of decorum, propriety, or moral

modesty in one's conduct or behavior. It is considered a desirable virtue in many cultural contexts, emphasizing humility and respect for social norms.

Individual's value and respect for their body image and their support for physical and mental health involve caring for and nourishing the body with adequate nutrients, energy and satisfaction. Intuitive eating guides the eating process better than following strict external rules, extreme dietary patterns, or restrictions as well as honoring cravings and making food choices. Healthy eating may require professional support, such as therapists, registered dietitians, or healthcare providers.

Through the continuous practice of self-restraint the mind that is always running to collect worldly objects, attains peace as this restlessness is temporary and a property of an individual mind. At the collective level, the cosmic mind is endowed with infinite peace, *śānti*, the embodiment of the Divine Mother.

However, to attain this infinite eternal peace, one must have *śraddhā* in the words of Guru and teachings of Vedanta. Sage Yaska defined *śraddhā* as: the firm conviction that holds on truth. It is the cause of one's liberation and is nothing other than the form of the Divine Mother. Only they attain Knowledge in whose mind Mother manifests Herself as *śraddhā*. It never gets destroyed if but once this firm conviction arises in the mind because of its doubt-free Real essential nature. In a very mundane level also this faith is essential. *Panchatantra*, book of ethical values, teaches the benefit obtained from herbs or medicine is directly proportional to the quality of one's feeling for them.

It becomes easier to develop *śraddhā* in anything if everything in this creation is considered as illuminated with inner beauty and radiance; not only living beings but each and everything contains it. This is light called the *kānti* form of the Divine Mother. Each food item has its own beauty, *kānti* that gets manifested through aroma, color

and texture, feel, and most importantly taste. At the time of eating, this form of Mother is to be realized whole heartedly. There is a strong relationship between the process of eating and mindfulness. Technically it is often referred to as mindful eating. It involves being fully present in the moment, paying attention to the sensory experiences, thoughts, and emotions that arise during eating.

The mind observes the hunger and fullness cues, savors each bite, and eats with intention and gratitude. From gastronomic perspective it can be said through this the process of eating slows down, tunes in to the body's needs, develops a deeper connection with the food, and prevents overeating or under-eating.

The grace of Goddess Lakshmi, who is primarily associated with material wealth, abundance, success, beauty, grace, auspiciousness and prosperity, also represents beauty in all beings. She is depicted as a beautiful goddess adorned with jewelry and often seen seated or standing on a lotus flower. She, unlike Goddess Annapurnā, is more associated money that is necessary to obtain food. After all from economic perspective, food is a multi-billion-dollar industry. There is no direct equivalent goddess to Mother Lakshmi either in Greek or in Roman mythologies. However, there are two notable Greek goddesses, Demeter and Tyche, associated with similar qualities and attributes as Mother Lakshmi. Demeter is associated with fertility, agriculture, and the harvest. She is often depicted as the nurturer and provider of abundance. Tyche, also known as Fortuna in Roman mythology, is the goddess of fortune, chance, and prosperity. She represents both fortune and bad luck. Tyche is often depicted with a cornucopia, a symbol of abundance and prosperity. While Tyche's domain is primarily luck and chance, she shares some similarities with the aspect of prosperity and abundance associated with Mother Lakshmi.

Lakshmi literally means *prāna*, the life force. As long as there is vital energy in the body so long a

being is connected with Lakshmi or Shri. The substratum of everything may it be money, luster, wealth, or beauty – is verily the vital energy. It is not perceivable by sense organs but it is a subject to experience. This entire cosmos is like an ocean of lives and each being is a wave in it.

The word *vṛtti* may mean job. Livelihood is also one of the expressions of consciousness. Food technology, also known as food science and technology, is a branch of science that encompasses a wide range of areas and is capable of creating jobs in the production, processing, preservation, packaging, and distribution of food products. Its goal is to involve various techniques to ensure a safe, nutritious, and abundant food supply while addressing concerns such as food waste, sustainability, and the development of new and healthier food products.

Yoga philosophy deals greatly with waves of thoughts or mental modification or *vṛtti*. Mental modifications represent that un-manifested consciousness, which holding onto something, presents itself as scenes. Everyone sees the creation through their own mindset. Works done through distracted or anxious mind are bound to deliver negative effect. Even if the task is as simple as eating, the eater's digestion may be affected, and they may not fully enjoy or appreciate the food. At the individual level the vibration is felt through the sense organs and mind, while in the collective level that worldwide indivisible vibration is named as God, the Divine Mother.

Vṛtti also stands for tendency. The one who with tendency of offering food to the Divine Mother and partaking in the consecrated food, *prasadam* is believed to get connected with Mother's divine energy, receive Her blessings, and purify oneself both physically and spiritually.

Whatever is manifested as *vṛtti*, that surely gets deposited in intellect as the faculty of remembrance, *smṛti*. When all those deposits floats up on the mind-surface, then it is called memory. It is the cognitive process by which past experiences and all types of knowledge are retained drop by

drop for lives after lives and recalled. In the Vedic scriptures, there is a concept called "smaranam," which involves actively remembering the divine qualities and teachings of spiritual figures and also capable of influencing our eating habits and choices. The mind functions through memory, perception (*pratyaksha*), inference (*anumana*), and insight (*anubhava*) and can cause liberation. As mentioned earlier from the Chandogya Upanishad, the intellect becomes pure by maintaining purity of food. The next line of the verse says through pure intellect comes constant remembrance (*sattova-suddhau dhruva smṛtihi*) and *smṛti-lambhe* that is when one remembers their true Self, they become liberated from all bondages.

Personal memories of experiences and encounters with suffering evokes empathy and compassion within human beings. Again when moments where compassion or acts of kindness are recollected, it can inspire one to extend that compassion to others. The practice of remembrance guide one's actions with higher ideals and fostering a sense of interconnectedness with all beings. It is a *sātoika* modification of mind. Divine Mother Herself appears in the heart as an embodiment of compassion, *dayā*. From birth to death the flow of lives of countless beings continue on the compassionate form of Mother.

One of the founding factors of compassion is ethics. When it comes to food industry examination of the ethical dimensions of food production, consumption, and distribution. Some of the issues related to ethical considerations are animal welfare, fair trade, food justice, sustainable sourcing, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and food additives.

Anyway, for the practice of compassion both mindfulness and the activation of memory are required as being mindful of the suffering of others and drawing upon the memories of similar experiences or acts of compassion, one can respond with empathy to alleviate sufferings.

Alleviation of suffering ends in contentment, the *tuṣṭi* form of the Divine Mother. The state of mind

that arises in attaining desired outcomes or by non-occurrence of undesirable one – is the contentment form of the Divine Mother. This form is eternal. The Upanishad says: For who could live or breathe if there were not this delight of existence as the ether in which we dwell? This form of Mother manifests even amidst the cry of the grief-stricken, the pain of the sick, the hunger of the hungry.

Ma Sarada used to say, “*There is no treasure equal to contentment.*” After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother went for a pilgrimage for a few months and returned Kamarpukur to stay there permanently. Mother was going through difficult financial situation. She had rice from the paddy fields, one of which had been bought by Sri Ramakrishna in the name of their family deity Raghuvir. She used to take that with boiled spinach – the leafy greens that grew by the pond. In British India salt was too expensive for her to afford. It did not bother Holy Mother to take only leafy greens and rice days after days. Rather, later also Mother’s relatives said one of her favorite items was fried leaves of creeping wood-sorrel (*āmrul*).

Mother, *mātr*, is the one who expresses an unmanifested seed of a being through Her will power. The whole creation is lying in Mother’s lap. Just as a mother nourishes her child with milk and food, the Divine Mother is believed to provide physical and spiritual sustenance to Her devotees. As the symbol of mother nature, an aspect of Divine Mother, food items are kept in ritual worship. During the autumnal worship of Mother Durga worship of *nava-patrikā* is such an example. In almost all major religions, during ritual worship common offerings are milk, grains, and fruits. Later two represent fertility and abundance, while milk symbolizes nourishment and purity. By consuming these food items or incorporating them into rituals, devotees connect with the qualities and energies associated with the divine energy of

mother nature.

Speaking of nature, it worth mentioning that the environmental impact of food production encompasses agriculture, livestock farming, fishing, and food processing. These are currently being addressed through the adoption of sustainable practices like organic farming, regenerative agriculture, etc.. Food scientists aim to reduce food waste, minimize the ecological footprint associated with food production, and become more environmentally conscious and responsible food system.

The Mother form in the created universe is all pervading and obvious; even when the creation is absent, Mother is there as an unrevealed Self. This unrevealed Self is alone is Real; the whole creation is mere appearance only and the Divine Mother is an embodiment of *bhrānti*. Just like the snake is perceived on the rope, the world-delusion is appearing on Brahman that is attribute-free and devoid of qualities. There is no delusion in Brahman. The individual soul is by itself is illusory. As long as the world is there, the indescribable illusory form will also be there as that is the Divine play. All three states – waking, sleeping, and deep sleep, all are illusions or errors.

There are two types of errors: *Samvādi* (rightly leading error) and *Visamvādi* (misleading error). The first one helps one to realize their eternal, pure, all-knowing, ever-free, and essential nature. Through the rightly leading error one is capable of completing the circle that began with *aham annam* stated at the very outset of the article. The journey showed that the eater, object of eating and the process of eating are all the same expression of one Mother, and it culminates in ultimate realization:

*aham bhojanam naiva bhojyam na bhoktā
cidānanda rūpaḥ śivoham śivoham*

I am not the eater, neither the process of enjoying
nor the food itself,

I am the form of consciousness and bliss,
I am the eternal Shiva.



Homer Glen:

By celebrating Kalpataru Day the Society started its yearly activities. In January Swami Vivekananda Birthday Puja, February Maha Shivaratri Puja, and in March Sri Ramakrishna Birth Anniversary Puja were conducted.

Society's Sunday Services and Wednesday Classes resumed in March. Swami Ishatmananda completed his almost two-year-long lecture series on Yoga Vasishtha and started new series on Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. There were Special Talks on the auspicious occasions of Rama Navami, Easter, Adi Shankara and Buddha Jayanti, Mother's Day, and Father's Day.

On January 12 the Society had a Bhandara in honor of Swami Varadanandaji.

On the second Saturday of each month there was Ram Nam Sankirtan.

After the passing away of Swami Varadananda the Society welcomed its new trustee Swami Kripamayananda, Head of the Vedanta Society of Toronto.

Home of Harmony:

After the winter recess the "Know and Love" series resumed in March 2023. Swami Ishatmananda continued his presentation series on the topic Organization of Gods - commemorating the 125th anniversary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Other distinguished speakers were Susan Pudelek (Archdiocese of Chicago), Bruce Duffield (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints), Colleen Taylor, and Charles Nolley. The cultural events included World Music by Ananda Lila Kirtan, Carnatic Renditions, and devotional singing in Hindustani Classical genres.

On April 15, 2023 the Memorial Service of Swami Varadananda was observed in the presence of Swamis Ishatmananda, Yogatmananda, Kripamayananda, representatives of various religions and devotees.

People from in and around Chicago city had been regularly participating in the **Yoga and Meditation sessions** every Sunday. All are

welcome to these sessions which are offered at no cost.

The **School of World Religions** conducts online courses on religious study. Students from all over the world enroll in these courses. The education is offered at no cost and the course enrollment has no demographic restrictions.

The courses are cohort-based and runs from March to December. From 2022, a comprehensive course on Hinduism is being offered titled - "Hinduism, a Systematic Study of Sanatana Dharma." 96 participants enrolled this year.

In 2023, two new online courses were added. Introductory Study of Eastern Religions - Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Taoism. 57 participants enrolled.

Introductory Study of Semitic Religions - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. 35 participants enrolled.

Ganges:

From May monthly spiritual retreats began with Swami Kripamayananda. In June Swami Satyamayananda of Vedanta Society of Western Washington led the retreat.

Other Activities:

Swami Ishatmananda visited India during January-February and delivered lectures and conducted spiritual retreats in many Ramakrishna Mission centers there.

Upon return the Swami continues to give classes, both in person and via zoom, on *Bhagavad Gita*, *The Fragrance of Vedanta: Kapilopadesha*, Bengali *Kathamrita*, *Uddhava Gita*, *Kathopanishad*, *Bhagavatam*, and *Ramayana*.

Groups from Colorado and Washington DC met monthly for informal spiritual question answer sessions.

The Swami attended Vedanta Society of Greater WDC, Silver Jubilee Celebration and delivered a talk and also led Spiritual Retreats at the Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama Pittsburgh, and Vedanta Society of Greater Houston.

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