

## THE YOGIC DIET

*Swami Kriyananda*



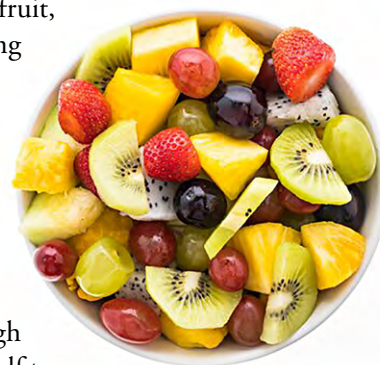
The approach of yoga to the subject of right living is always from a standpoint of what is natural. From a standpoint of diet, too, the emphasis is purely natural. What is the *proper* food for the human body? This is the question asked, not, what are the religious, sentimental, or social considerations? Meat, for example, is obviously the natural food for some animals. Were it not, whole species would reproduce to the point where this planet could not produce enough food to feed them. The question is, simply, whether meat (as one example) is the right food for one particular species, man.

Swami Sri Yukteswar, in his book, *The Holy Science*, points out that the body of man is not that of a carnivore. His intestinal tract, compared to the length of his body, is that of a frugivorous, or fruit-eating animal. Carnivores have intestinal tracts three to five times the length of their bodies; herbivores, 20 to 28 times that length. Frugivorous animals, including man, have intestinal tracts 10 to 12 times the length of their bodies. (Sri Yukteswar points out that when measuring the body of man, one must measure it as one does those of other animals, from the mouth to the anus, not from the crown of the head to the soles of the feet.)

Man's tooth structure, also, is that of a fruit-eating animal. His teeth are not long and pointed like those of carnivorous animals that must rend and tear the flesh they eat. Nor are his teeth flat like those of a horse, which slowly ruminates.

Man, of all the animals, has the mental freedom to develop tastes far outside his own natural instinctual pattern. There are human beings, for example, who actually enjoy eating raw flesh. It cannot be gainsaid, however, that the usual inclination of man is to conceal his slaughterhouses behind high walls, where he cannot see or hear the animals being killed. The thought of killing is offensive to his refined, more sensitive animal nature. When he buys meat, he usually disguises it by cooking it. He refers to it euphemistically, not as flesh, but as steaks, chops, drumsticks, etc. In advertising one never sees pictures of bloody carcasses presented to attract the potential customer to some other product. One *is* likely, however, to see a bowl of fruit.

For man, there is something instinctively attractive in fruit, particularly when the palate has not been abused by years of wrong eating. There is a natural inclination in man for the saliva to flow at the very sight of a bowl of cherries, grapes, apples, or bananas. Fruit is the most spiritual of all foods. It is natural for man, the most spiritually advanced of all the animals, to be instinctively attracted to those foods which are best adapted to developing his spiritual sensitivity.



Because yogis emphasize the natural approach to right diet and right living, they would also point out that the body, through years of wrong living, may not be capable of suddenly adjusting itself to a perfect diet. Dr. Lewis, the first disciple of Paramhansa Yogananda in America, gave up eating meat shortly after meeting the Master. Sometime later, he began suffering mysterious aches and pains in his body. He went to a succession of doctors. None of them was able to diagnose his difficulty. Finally, he asked the Master what the trouble might be. The Master said, "Your body has been accustomed to eating meat. The cells are crying out for it, out of past habit. Eat a little meat once a week, and the pains will disappear." Dr. Lewis followed the Master's advice, and was almost immediately cured. Some years later, he was able to give up his meat diet completely.

If you must eat meat, do try strictly to avoid beef and pork. Pork is an unclean flesh, owing to the eating habits of pigs. Yoganandaji said of beef that he had seen butchers in the slaughterhouses in this country scooping cancers out of cattle after killing them. It is an interesting fact that cancer is far more prevalent in the West, where beef is widely eaten, than in India, where the average Hindu, at least, will not touch it. Yoganandaji said that beef eating is one of the prime



causes of cancer. If you must eat meat, eat it less frequently, and try to eat only fish, fowl, and a little lamb occasionally.

We have said that meat eating is unnatural for man. So also is the wearing of glasses, yet men get along fairly well with them. Is there a more specific inducement for limiting one's diet to fruit and vegetables? Indeed there is. Meat eating in general, because it is unnatural, is also the cause of many diseases in man. Certain Western doctors have actually made this statement with no encouragement from yogis. Yogis have always claimed this to be true. Many friends and students of mine, who, after giving up meat for a time, have gone back to it if only temporarily, have told me that the contrast in the way they felt after returning to a meat diet was phenomenal. They felt much more sluggish and mentally heavy. They had less endurance. They felt easily tired. Much has been made in Western dietary books

of the high energy-giving properties of meat. Overlooked are the poisons that prevent the free manifestation of that energy. It is not enough to eat food that is high in energy. It is important also to eat foods that can be eliminated easily from the body, and that keep the body free of toxins. With such food, even a little bit of energy can provide a great deal of strength. There are plenty of proteins available in foods other than meat: Nuts, beans, avocados, and sprouts are valuable sources of protein. Yogis say that cheese—particularly fresh cheeses—milk, and milk products are not only admissible, but actually desirable in the human diet. Though yogis do not generally recommend eggs, Westerners may find it preferable to include eggs in their diet for reasons that we have stated in an earlier lesson.

A final, but important, thought should be expressed on this subject. The food we eat is more than an assortment of chemicals. Essentially, it is vibration. As such, it affects our consciousness. Animals, because of their more developed nervous systems (compared to that of vegetables), feel intense anguish, anger, and fear when they are killed. These emotions fill their bodies with toxins. More than that, they implant in the animals' bodies the vibrations of their strong emotions. People who eat such flesh take into themselves something of these emotions. It is no accident that the more warlike, aggressive nations are also heavy meat eaters, or that the more peaceful nations incline to be vegetarians. For a person on the path of yoga, it is important to give up foods that of their very nature obstruct any effort to achieve inner peace and harmony. For the yogi, a fruit and vegetarian diet is important above all because of the calming effect it has on his mind and nervous system.

I have said that man is a fruit-eating animal. And now suddenly I have recommended a vegetarian, rather than a strictly frugivorous, diet. The reason I have done so is that the bodies of most people at this point in time are not sensitive enough to be able to live on a diet of only fruits and nuts. Some cooked vegetables are necessary for most people, who are in a state of transition from a highly unnatural diet. In more advanced ages, man will be able to give up even such refined foods as fruits and nuts, and live directly from the inner energy, even as certain highly evolved souls have been known to do in our time (the Christian mystic, Therese Neumann, in Bavaria, Germany, for example).

☞ *The Art and Science of Raja Yoga, Step Six: Diet* ☞