

Commentary on the Bahá'í Writings about Food for Humans

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Introduction

This commentary is my understanding of what the Bahá'í Writings are telling us regarding the food humans were made to eat. This is my personal interpretation of the Writings. It is not the official standpoint of the Bahá'í Faith. It is, however, one person's attempt to share his understanding of the Bahá'í Writings about the diet of human beings. You are free to disagree. I am not saying you have to eat this way. Everyone is at various levels of understanding and it is not my intention to say we all have to understand the Writings as I am presenting them here.

Meat was not determined by God to be the food for humans and we were not designed to eat it.

“Regarding the eating of animal flesh and abstinence therefrom, know thou of a certainty that, in the beginning of creation, God determined the food of every living being, and to eat contrary to that determination is not approved.”

In this quote, we are told that God in His greatness, has not only created everything but has also designated the food for all living creatures at the beginning of creation. We are also told that to eat contrary or against this designated food is not approved. This means that there are certain foods specifically designed for all creatures, including human beings. Since there is a specific food designed and designated for us by God, this is the food that is best for us to eat. We might be able to eat contrary to His design but according to the quote, it is not approved. The Writings make this very clear by providing examples.

“For instance, beasts of prey, such as the wolf, lion and leopard, are endowed with ferocious, tearing instruments, such as hooked talons and claws. From this it is evidence that the food of such beasts is meat. If they were to attempt to graze, their teeth would not cut the grass, neither could they chew the cud, for they do not have molars. Likewise, God hath given to the four-footed grazing animals such teeth as reap the grass like a sickle, and from this we understand that the food of these species of animal is vegetable. They cannot chase and hunt down other animals. The falcon hath a hooked beak and sharp talons; the hooked beak preventeth him from grazing, therefore his food is also meat.”

These examples paint a clear picture of the physiological differences between carnivores and herbivores which make it impossible for either to eat contrary to the design of God.

Many people will say, humans are omnivores and that is why we are designed the way we are. However, the Writings also take human beings into account.

“But now coming to man, we see he hath neither hooked teeth nor sharp nails or claws, nor teeth like iron sickles. From this it becometh evident and manifest that the food of man is cereal and fruit.”

This quote does not support the idea that man is an omnivore. In fact, it specifically states that the food God designed for humans to eat is fruit and grains. `Abdu'l-Bahá continues giving us clear physiological evidence for this claim.

“Some of the teeth of man are like millstones to grind the grain, and some are sharp to cut the fruit.”

It is clear that humans were created with the intention by God, to eat a plant-based diet. Some will wonder about the canine teeth. The Writings are clear about these as well.

“Thou hast written regarding the four canine teeth in man, saying that these teeth, two in the upper jaw and two in the lower, are for the purpose of eating meat. Know thou that these four teeth are not created for meat-eating, although one can eat meat with them. All the teeth of man are made for eating fruit, cereals and vegetables. These four teeth, however, are designed for breaking hard shells, such as those of almonds.”

It is clear that the canine teeth were not intended by God for humans to consume meat. It is equally clear that the intention of God when designing the canine teeth was so that we could eat nuts, grains and fruit. Of course we can eat meat with them, however, if we look at the first quote while it is possible, it isn't the intention and therefore, not approved.

Study questions:

1. In the beginning what did God determine for every living being?
2. What was the intended food designed for humans?

We do not need to eat meat to be healthy and the choice to not eat it is more pleasing to God

The Writings actually continue suggesting that we do not need to eat meat to be healthy.

“Therefore he is not in need of meat, nor is he obliged to eat it. Even without eating meat he would live with the utmost vigour and energy.”

It is clear and evident from this quote that humans can live life healthy and full of vigour and energy without meat.

Some will say that we have to wait until scientific knowledge progresses to a point that we can get all the nutritional needs met by a plant-based diet. However, the Writings bring up current civilizations that do not eat meat and are just as healthy

“For example, the community of the Brahmins in India do not eat meat; notwithstanding this they are not inferior to other nations in strength, power, vigour, outward senses or intellectual virtues.”

It is, therefore, clear that humans do not need to eat meat to be healthy. The Writings continue adding that, not only do humans not need meat, it is better and more pleasing in God's eyes if we choose to eat a plant-based diet and not kill animals for food.

"Truly, the killing of animals and the eating of their meat is somewhat contrary to pity and compassion, and if one can content oneself with cereals, fruit, oil and nuts, such as pistachios, almonds and so on, it would undoubtedly be better and more pleasing."

Study Questions:

1. Do humans need to eat meat to be healthy?
2. What is undoubtedly better and more pleasing in regards to the food we eat?

Meat is okay to eat when it is sometimes necessary

Some people will say, there are no Writings that say it is against the Teachings to eat meat. This is true, however, the Writings are clear about when it is considered okay to eat meat.

"Meat is nourishing and containeth the elements of herbs, seeds and fruits; therefore sometimes it is essential for the sick and for the rehabilitation of health. There is no objection in the Law of God to the eating of meat if it is required. So if thy constitution is rather weak and thou findest meat useful, thou mayest eat it."

According to the Writings, the consumption of meat is sometimes essential for the sick and for the rehabilitation of health. Basically, it is not against the Law of God if it is required. So if you are sick and need to eat it, you are free to eat it. However, if we look at this quote deeper, it is basically saying that meat is only for the rehabilitation of the health. If you are not sick, and your constitution is strong you do not need to eat it. We are basically only supposed to eat meat if it is required for health. It is not against the Law of God if required.

If we look at the Writings above, normal people do not need meat to be healthy, therefore, we do not need to eat it. If it is not required for health, it is clear from the Writings above, that it would be better and more pleasing in God's eyes if we didn't eat it unless we need to for the rehabilitation of health.

Study Questions:

1. When is meat sometimes essential?
2. When is eating meat not against the Law of God?

The food of the future will be plant-based.

It is my understanding that eventually, we will all come to this realization about how God intended us to eat. This understanding comes from the following quote.

“The food of the future will be fruit and grains. The time will come when meat will no longer be eaten. Medical science is only in its infancy, yet it has shown that our natural food is that which grows out of the ground.”

(‘Abdu’l-Baha, from Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era, page 102)

If we look at this quote deeper we see that we will all eventually become vegan because science has proven that our natural food is that which grows out of the ground. This also brings us back up to the beginning where we looked at the food God intended at creation for humans, “All the teeth of man are made for eating fruit, cereals, and vegetables.”

It is my understanding that in the future meat will only be eaten as a medication when absolutely necessary for the rehabilitation of health and nothing more. This will hopefully come sooner than later. By choosing to eat in this manner we are also putting into practice other teachings from the Writings about compassion and love towards all creatures.

Study Questions:

1. What will the food of the future be?
2. What has science shown our natural food is?

Other reasons a Baha’i might choose to not eat meat.

The Baha’i Writings make it clear that we must treat animals with mercy, compassion and utmost loving-kindness.

“[I]t is not only their fellow human beings that the beloved of God must treat with mercy and compassion, rather must they show forth the utmost loving-kindness to every living creature.”

The Writings continue providing us reasons why we must show kindness and compassion to animals. Basically, it is because animals share the same feelings as humans do in regards to the physical aspects. There is no difference in causing harm to an animal and causing harm to a human as they will both feel the same physical sensation.

“For in all physical respects, and where the animal spirit is concerned, the selfsame feelings are shared by animal and man. Man hath not grasped this truth, however, and he believeth that physical sensations are confined to human beings, wherefore is he unjust to the animals, and cruel. And yet in truth, what difference is there when it cometh to physical sensations? The feelings are one and the same, whether ye inflict pain on man or on beast. There is no difference here whatever.”

This is a truth that we humans have yet to grasp as stated above. I believe that when we do understand this fact, we will no longer want to kill animals for food as this goes against being kind and compassionate. We would never consider killing another human being for food. In many cultures it is okay to eat some animals but not others. However, this is not in line with the Writings. All animals deserve our kindness and compassion, not just the ones we consider pets.

The Writings continue, saying that to harm an animal is worse than harming man since the animal lacks the capacity to fight for justice.

“And indeed ye do worse to harm an animal, for man hath a language, he can lodge a complaint, he can cry out and moan; if injured he can have recourse to the authorities and these will protect him from his aggressor. But the hapless beast is mute, able neither to express its hurt nor take its case to the authorities ...”

With this in mind the Master says that we must be kinder to the animal than we are to our fellow man. Because man can complain and animals cannot we have to be the ones who take care of the animals and stand up for their justice.

“Therefore it is essential that ye show forth the utmost consideration to the animal, and that ye be even kinder to him than to your fellow man.”

If this is the case, we must as humans, consider that the animals we are raising for food probably feel the same way as humans do regarding death. They don't want to die, yet when we raise animals for food, no matter how they are treated while living, they do not have the right to live a full and fruitful life and are killed against their own will. If we would not kill another human against their own will, is killing an animal against its will showing forth utmost consideration to the animal? Is killing the animal against their will being even kinder to them than our fellow man?

The Master continues saying that we must train our children to be “infinitely tender and loving to animals.”

“Train your children from their earliest days to be infinitely tender and loving to animals. If an animal be sick, let them try to heal it, if it be hungry, let them feed it, if thirsty, let them quench its thirst, if weary, let them see that it rests.”

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, compiled by the Universal House of Justice, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1996, p. 167.

If we take these quotes into consideration and think about what eating an animal means in regards to how the animal is treated, it is clear that in most cases, eating an animal goes against treating an animal with mercy and compassion.

As the Guardian has stated, *“In regard to the question as to whether people ought to kill animals for food or not, there is no explicit statement in the Baha'i Sacred Scriptures (as far as I know) in favour or against it. It is certain, however, that if man can live on a purely vegetarian diet and thus avoid killing animals, it would be much preferable. This is, however, a very controversial question and the Baha'is are free to express their views on it.”*

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, July 9, 1931; quoted in Lights of Guidance, no. 1010)

If we look at the above quote it is clear that it is preferable in God's eyes to eat in a way that does not harm animals.

Study Question:

1. Why is it worse to harm an animal than a man?
2. What is preferable according to the Guardian in reference to killing animals for food?

What will happen when we eat as intended by God?

The Writings are very clear that when we eat simply, according to the intention by God and no longer living as slaves to our lustful appetites, chronic and diversified illnesses will decrease in intensity and the health and wellbeing of humans will improve.

“At whatever time highly-skilled physicians shall have developed the healing of illnesses by means of foods, and shall make provision for simple foods, and shall prohibit humankind from living as slaves to their lustful appetites, it is certain that the incidence of chronic and diversified illnesses will abate, and the general health of all mankind will be much improved.” – Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 156.

“If humankind were free from the defilements of sin and waywardness, and lived according to a natural, inborn equilibrium, without following wherever their passions led, it is undeniable that diseases would no longer take the ascendant, nor diversify with such intensity. But man hath perversely continued to serve his lustful appetites, and he would not content himself with simple foods. Rather, he prepared for himself food that was compounded of many ingredients, of substances differing one from the other. With this, and with the perpetrating of vile and ignoble acts, his attention was engrossed, and he abandoned the temperance and moderation of a natural way of life. The result was the engendering of diseases both violent and diverse.” – Ibid., p. 152.

These quotes make it clear to me that eating a plant-based diet is not enough. We must also eat simply. Overly processed foods are not healthy for us either.

I am also reminded by this statement, “If humankind were free from the defilements of sin and waywardness, and lived according to a natural, inborn equilibrium, without following wherever their passions led, it is undeniable that diseases would no longer take the ascendant, nor diversify with such intensity.” that if we decided to eat in the manner intended by God as designated by Him in the beginning of creation, we would undoubtedly be healthier. I am sure that if we had not “abandoned the temperance and moderation of a natural way of life.” and eaten in accordance to the design of God our overall health as a race would be much better.

Study Questions:

1. What will happen when we eat simple foods and are no longer a slave to our lustful appetites?

How this should affect our choices

In the March 1st 2017 letter the Universal House of Justice espouses that *“Every choice a Bahá’í makes—as employee or employer, producer or consumer, borrower or lender, benefactor or beneficiary—leaves a trace, and the moral duty to lead a coherent life demands that one’s economic decisions be in accordance with lofty ideals, that the purity of one’s aims be matched by the purity of one’s actions to fulfill those aims. Naturally, the friends habitually look to the teachings to set the standard to which to aspire.”*

This got me thinking about the choices we make everyday with what we choose to eat. If we want to live our life in accordance to lofty ideals found in the Baha'i Writings. We need to consider the Writings we have already looked at above.

If we choose to buy food which impacts the environment negatively, contributes to the growing number of deaths in our society and is contrary to treating animals kindly are we living a life that is "in accordance with lofty ideals"?

Study Questions:

1. What should guide us when we make choices?
2. What should the purity of our aims match?

Why would a Baha'i, after learning this, want to eat a plant-based diet?

LOVE! It is my understanding that when you love someone, you want to please them. You do things, even if they are hard, to make them happy. When you hear of something that will make them happy, your first thought is that you would like to try to do this for them, because it will make them happy. Love is a powerful motivator.

"What a power is love! It is the most wonderful, the greatest of all living powers.

Love gives life to the lifeless. Love lights a flame in the heart that is cold. Love brings hope to the hopeless and gladdens the hearts of the sorrowful.

In the world of existence, there is indeed no greater power than the power of love."

Love is only of the four kinds... (a) The love of God towards the identity of God. Christ has said God is Love. (b) The love of God for His children—for His servants. (c) The love of man for God and (d) the love of man for man. These four kinds of love originate from God. These are rays from the Sun of Reality; these are the Breathings of the Holy Spirit; these are the Signs of the Reality.

It is the second kind of love that motivates humans to change. The Master explains this love as follows:

The second is the love that flows from man to God. This is faith, attraction to the Divine, enkindlement, progress, entrance into the Kingdom of God, receiving the Bounties of God, illumination with the lights of the Kingdom. This love is the origin of all philanthropy; this love causes the hearts of men to reflect the rays of the Sun of Reality.

When we love God we need to ensure that our love shows itself in deeds because if it is in words alone it is of no use. The Master has said, *“Love manifests its reality in deeds, not only in words—these alone are without effect.”*

When we truly love God, nothing is too much trouble. *“Where there is love, nothing is too much trouble and there is always time”*—Abdu'l-Bahá. This kind of love would make it possible for a believer to read the following quotes from above and then place them into action so that *“one’s economic decisions be in accordance with lofty ideals, that the purity of one’s aims be matched by the purity of one’s actions to fulfill those aims.”*

“Therefore it is essential that ye show forth the utmost consideration to the animal, and that ye be even kinder to him than to your fellow man.”

“Truly, the killing of animals and the eating of their meat is somewhat contrary to pity and compassion, and if one can content oneself with cereals, fruit, oil and nuts, such as pistachios, almonds and so on, it would undoubtedly be better and more pleasing.”

It is certain, however, that if man can live on a purely vegetarian diet and thus avoid killing animals, it would be much preferable.

It is clear from the above quotes that, if we love God, and we want to do the things that are more pleasing, better and preferable, we should not consume meat, unless absolutely necessary for the rehabilitation of health.

Study Questions:

1. What has the power to motivate humans to change their actions?
2. What action is preferable, better and undoubtedly more pleasing when it comes to consuming animals as food?

Conclusion

It is my understanding that in the beginning God designed a food for humans. This food is grains, seeds, nuts, fruits and vegetables, not meat. We can turn to the physiological makeup of our bodies to see that this is the case. Meat is okay to eat when it is needed for the rehabilitation of health but in normal everyday life it is not needed. In fact humans do not need to eat meat to be healthy and if we can choose not to eat it, it is more pleasing and preferable in the sight of God. If we choose not to eat meat we are also choosing to show kindness to animals and therefore is preferable. If we eat as intended by God, the health and wellbeing of the human

race will improve. It is these lofty ideals that must guide us when we are making choices about what we put in our bodies. It is love towards God that should be our motivator to make these changes.

Sources.

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