

8. Forms of food

THE mind of man is not an organ that can be identified physiologically; it cannot be touched or operated on by doctors or surgeons. It is an intangible bundle of resolutions and hesitations; of wishes and wants; to pros and cons. It has as warp and woof of the wishes that man entertains with reference to outward objects and sensations. It easily rushes out after external pleasures and assumes the shapes of the things it seeks. It can also be turned back into searching for inner contentment and inner joy. That is why the mind is said to be the instrument for both bondage and liberation. Allow the senses to lead it outward; it binds. Allow the intelligence to prevail upon it to look inward for bliss; it liberates.

The mind is the puppet of the food that is consumed by man. It is prompted one way or the other by the subtle pull of the food it is fed on. The quality of the food determines the direction of the desire that diverts the mental flow. That is why in the Geetha as well as in all scriptural texts, *saathwik* (pure) food is recommended for the upward seeking individual. Mind means desire, *sankalpa* (resolve), something sought for. When the Formless desired Form, the Universe arose; so, mind is the creative principle, the *maaya* (illusion), that desired the very first desire, to be many. When it is now fed on *rajas*---*passion* and emotion, activity and adventure---it gallops into the world with the plunge of desire! It brings man deeper into the morass. When it is fed on *thaamasik* (impure) food, which dulls, inebriates, blunts reason, and induces sloth, the mind is callous, inert and useless for uplifting man.

The three types of 'food' eaten by man

Saathwik food, according to some, consists in milk and fruits. But, it is much more; it may not even be these. For, the calories that one takes in through the mouth are but a small part of the intake of man. The intake by the senses are part of the food that builds the individual. The sounds heard, the sights seen, the tactile impressions sought or suffered, the air breathed, the environment that presses for attention, appreciation and adoption---all these are 'food.' They have considerable impact on the character and career of the individual.

The quality of the food is determined by the vibrations that it is charged with, through the thought processes of the persons who handle it, prepare it and serve it. The 17th chapter of the Geetha clearly defines the nature and tastes of the three types of 'food' eaten by man: the food that promotes love, virtue, strength, happiness, and cordiality is *Saathwik*; that which inflames, arouses, intoxicates and heightens hunger and thirst is *Raajasik*; the food that depresses, disrupts, and causes disease is *Thamaasik*.

The company in which food is consumed, the place, the vessels in which it is cooked, the emotions that agitate the mind of the person who cooks it and serves it---all these have subtle influences on the nature and emotions of the persons who takes the final product in! It is because the sages of India realised this that they laid down many do's and don'ts for the process of eating, as-for the different stages of spiritual progress.

Our thoughts trail off in directions determined by the sounds that fall upon the ear. When the sounds convey rebuke or praise, flattery or challenge, the thoughts too react correspondingly. When the sounds instil ideas of truth, beauty or goodness, the mind too seeks the silence of truth, the sweetness of beauty and harmony, the strength of goodness.

Nagarasankeerthan is the greatest disinfectant

I have directed that you should start this day with *Nagarasankeerthan* (street singing of spiritual hymns), for, it is the greatest disinfectant of the atmosphere of the individual, as well as the community. The *puuja* (ritualistic worship) in the domestic shrine, the recitation of hymns, the *bhajan* (group singing of devotional songs) that you do, all send forth vibrations that purify and cleanse the atmosphere, and so, disinfect the 'food' that you consume.

Pareekshith listened to stories of Divine Glory and so, he was hastened on the path of liberation, during the seven fateful days. So too the sight of temples, churches, mosques and houses surcharged with Divinity, of idols and sculptures depicting the mystery and majesty of God in His various Forms, of scenes that instil in your mind the littleness of man before the vastness of God's handiwork---these have a salutary effect on the formation of character, and the direction of habits and attitudes.

The senses have to be controlled, primarily because they pursue deleterious influences that harass man and lead him into ruin. Inner peace is lost when the senses feed man on inflaming wants and infructuous desires. For the *saadhaka* (spiritual aspirant)---and, who can escape being a *saadhaka*?---the intake must always be pure and blameless, *saathwik*. The sounds, the sights, the impressions, the ideas, the lessons, the contacts, the impacts---all must promote reverence, humility, balance, equanimity and simplicity. If the impressions are *raajasik*, the mind will get agitated, vengeful, fanatic and fearsome. If they are *thamaasik*, the mind will not even be aroused into the awareness of its own innate handicaps. It is only the *saathwik* 'food' that will keep the mind on an even keel, fully concentrated on the *Aathma* on which one must contemplate in order to attain peace.

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When you are eager to place offerings before the Lord, let your offering be love, instead of transitory materials. Love is the very light of love; it is the only comprehensive Code of Conduct.

Sri Sathya Sai