

Worshipping in Beauty

by Rose Moloney

I was opened in 1971 and this was a wonderful time to be part of Subud, with Bapak visiting the UK many times. Most of us were baby-boomers wanting to live a more spiritual life. But within our chosen path was something ugly that we chose not to see. Meanwhile, friends of mine went east on the India trail and embraced a vegetarian life and teachings which we in Subud felt superior to. The latihan, we were told, was on a higher level than anything else.

During the past forty years I have practised the latihan and have received from it a unique voice training which allows me to sing an octave higher. Yet I have several times gone away, alienated by members or testing fiascos. When I have returned to group latihan, I have always left disillusioned. For example, I was offered a job at the Congress in Innsbruck in 2005 but withdrew when I saw to my disgust veal on the menu every day. The veal trade is horribly cruel. Subud seems to be like mainstream society, only caring about companion animals. In the last ten years I have observed a worrying decline in *life force* around the groups. After spending time in vibrant vegetarian centres I return to Subud gatherings where red meat is served and I am struck by the contrast — a darker atmosphere, a heavier vibration.

On one of my explorations of other spiritualities I spent time in an Indian ashram where the sumptuous buffets were vegetarian. This was another way of life. There was light and beauty around those meals and I felt lighter. So, fifteen years after being opened in Subud I went vegetarian. My grandfather was a butcher-farmer; we had meat every day growing up. Even now my favourite meal would be roast chicken. Devouring corpses or 'the relish for blood', as the life-long vegetarian Gandhi described it, is deeply embedded in our genes. But if we are 'natural meat eaters' descended from hunters, then we are also descended from cannibals, as archaeologists have concluded after examining, on every continent, human bones with cut marks and marrow removed. We have left cannibalism behind and must, I believe, progress beyond corpse eating. Even if we eat cellophane-packed organic meat, we are still predators taking the babies, baby milk, body-parts and blood of our fellow animals. Moving to a life-based diet can be gradual — giving up red meat first, then fowl, then fish, then eggs and cheese. A vegan diet is the most harm-free, but most important is to cease to eat our fellow mammals or to exploit them.

But weren't we blinkered from seeing animal suffering in the vision we accepted in Subud? This bias comes from the religions of the Middle East — Judaism, Christianity and Islam — which have upheld the statement in Genesis, where God told Adam and Eve: 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.' A Subud Catholic doctor who read this article informed me that this is the clinching factor as to why we are entitled to devour the animals in our Eden. I challenge this and ask you to consider another mind-set in which the latihan could flourish in beauty by being vegetarian or vegan based. This is not something I have chosen for the sake of my health or longevity nor to save the planet for ecological reasons. I live this way of life for spiritual advancement out of compassion for the animals.

A stag will climb a high hill when he is about to die. A pig gambols about playfully when he is returned to his natural habitat — the forest — for pannage (acorns). Chickens roost up trees. Cows, bulls and calves have a family and social order of which forlorn adolescent groups in fields today are bereft. All species need to make their journey and long to roam. Every single one has a unique character. But progressive farming is only a sop to our consciences. Ceasing to exploit them is the only enlightened thing to do.[1]

Behind the objections to liberating animals, I notice two factors:

Firstly, addiction. I too am an addict. The taste of blood and flesh is addictive; we are no different from other craving addicts.

Secondly, there is a lack of empathy for our fellow creatures, a denial that all animals long to live. Could you eat the pig on your plate if you had seen him eye to eye or known him as a piglet, more playful and intelligent than a dog? The tricks of the piglets who played in the movie 'Babe' were not computer generated; sausage sales went down after that when children realised *who* was on their plate.[2] Most of us have superseded the way of life of our parents, the old way of thinking and working. Yet we cling to the outmoded diet which was part of that old-world way of life. If our life depends on causing suffering to animals, then we truly have landed in a kind of Hell. But I don't accept that life has to depend on slaughter.

Bapak's beliefs were partly derived from Islam and partly from shamanic Indonesian folk practices. Reading *Susila Budhi Dharma*, his book, I was struck that he promotes the shamanic idea found in many cultures that you eat goats to be virile, cows to be docile, cockerels to be polygamous etc. Such shamanic beliefs have had a huge hold on humanity, to our detriment, along with animal sacrifice. Eat as many bulls as you like — it won't make you strong. The strongest creatures — elephants, gorillas etc — are vegetation eaters. Gladiators were called 'barley-eaters' and the graves excavated at Ephesus, where I lived last year, yielded eighty skeletons of these arena veterans, whose bone analysis revealed they were vegans. Probably they ate this way for strength, not ethics.[3]

When I was given a Winston Churchill History Fellowship to travel to ancient Greek cities from Athens to Amman and Alexandria to Pergamon, I found out that Hellenic sanctuaries demanded much higher standards of purification in diet, fasting and washing than the Abrahamic religions which supplanted them. Apollonius of Tyana lived at the same time as Jesus. He travelled all over the Greek world and to India reforming the practices of the holy places to correct one error — animal sacrifice. In all other ways I have found the religion of Ancient Greece superior. Their diet too was better; the Mediterranean Diet — olive oil, salads, vegetables, fruit and fish — is now recommended as the healthiest, and reduces cancer risk.[4]

I never heard Bapak speak about the appalling plight of animals with whom we share the planet. He spoke of *animal forces* within us, serving us — human beings — the most important species on the Earth. I was in the kitchen where Bapak was staying on one visit to the UK; he had at least two types of meat at every main meal. Bapak taught that meat eating is good, by example and in his talks. Therefore I have few hopes that I can persuade Subud members to switch their mind-set; it is easier to attract existing vegetarians to the latihan.

I now feel that speciesism, the exclusive focus on human importance, is a major injustice. Small children too imagine life revolves around them. It is immature. Are we prepared to share the planet with our fellow life-forms? We have long held back their intelligence,[5] but, worse, 20th century Westerners have reduced them to objects: we speak of a 'crop of lambs'; a chicken is actually called a 'product'.

I now see two types of creatures on this planet: the carnivore-predators and the herbivore-vegetarians. Interestingly, the chimpanzees evolved into two groups: the Chimps who will gang-murder their own, make war on other Chimp groups, seize their territories and keep their females, and eat other mammals; and, secondly, the Bonobos who are vegetarian and do not invade or murder. (In the last ten years humans have eaten almost all the Bonobos.)[6]

Do you want to align with violent, fear-makers like snakes and tigers and stay a human predator by eating flesh? Or become a divine being who causes little harm by eating fresh? Instead of top predator preying on the weaker species, we can be Guardians of the animals, Gardeners of the Earth. Animals are turning on their human enemy: a seal drowns a scientist deliberately; foxes have started to attack children. Why are we outraged? We have destroyed their children and taken their lives for centuries. Those of us attempting vegetarianism are, in the West, breaking millenia-old patterns of predatory behaviour.

Solar rich foods are filled with light and Vitamin D; the Sun is our purest form of energy. I sleep less, feel lighter, more energetic, closer to the Divine. I feel at peace knowing no animal has died miserably for me. I feel cleaner without decomposing flesh in my intestines and never get constipated ever. I am more attuned. I frequently go into bliss. I need less purification, though the latihan still gives my talents a tune-up. A five-minute latihan first thing opens up my day and everything synchronises. Yet the latihan has not generated empathy with other species in more of us.

We must not forget Bapak's indictment either: that if Anugraha failed, Subud would fail. Doesn't that give us permission now to create new contexts for the Latihan other than Islam, with its Koranic endorsement for devouring red meat and other flesh? Halal abattoirs are spreading over the UK; they are cruel and barbaric. I have spent months in Muslim countries — Jordan, Egypt and Turkey — and the awareness of animals' needs in those countries is zero. Animals are either used as objects or baited for cruel fun. The Koran has doomed animals to eternal hell on Earth. The Bible is no better. Religions which allow meat eating also endorse war.[7] When stranded in remote places, meat eaters will often eat each other. Meat eating is a consciousness which can be extended to killing, war and cannibalism. Vegetarianism/veganism is a consciousness based on honouring all life. I now read instead the great Greek philosophers, many of whom, like Pythagoras, were vegetarian.

In Subud terms vegetarianism is a form of *prihatin*, giving up something for a higher purpose, and therefore close to fasting. In Greek Orthodox Christianity, Lent was originally kept by giving up *all* blood foods including dairy and eggs. However, we must look to Eastern spirituality for examples. All Hindu holy men are vegetarian or vegan. I am vegetarian at the moment but when I was vegan I had the most exalted spiritual experiences, including ascending to heaven and on another occasion meeting Jesus in a night journey. Angelic beings assisted me. But must we look for personal gain in this

when a small sacrifice in giving up meat helps free the animals from being on death row? They sense when they are being sent to the abattoir and dread an unnatural death as much as we do. Author Betty Eadie and others who have written of death experiences report that, as they went upwards with other human souls who had died that day, there were animals going up to the Light alongside them. Vegetarianism does not need to justify itself; it is killing to eat which is indefensible.

I am starting an experimental latihan group which will be for those who accept or aspire to a cruelty-free vegetarian way of life, way of beauty. Vegetarianism is not a diet; it is higher consciousness. It is surely the next stage of evolution.

Notes:

1. Prof. Peter Singer, author of *Animal Liberation*, on 'speciesism', from a 2006 interview with *Salon*:

The argument, in essence, is that we have, over centuries of history, expanded the circle of beings whom we regard as morally significant. If you go back in time you'll find tribes that were essentially only concerned with their own tribal members. If you were a member of another tribe, you could be killed with impunity. When we got beyond that there were still boundaries to our moral sphere, but these were based on nationality, or race, or religious belief. Anyone outside those boundaries didn't count.

Slavery is the best example here. If you were not a member of the European race, if you were African, specifically, you could be enslaved. So we got beyond that. We have expanded the circle beyond our own race and we reject as wrongful the idea that something like race or religion or gender can be a basis for claiming another being's interests count less than our own.

So the argument is that this is also an arbitrary stopping place; it's also a form of discrimination, which I call 'speciesism', that has parallels with racism. I am not saying it's identical, but in both cases you have this group that has power over the outsiders, and develops an ideology that says, Those outside our circle don't matter, and therefore we can make use of them for our own convenience.

That is what we have done, and still do, with other species. They're effectively things; they're property that we can own, buy and sell. We use them as convenient and we keep them in ways that suit us best, producing products we want at the cheapest prices. So my argument is simply that this is wrong, this is not justifiable if we want to defend the idea of human equality against those who have a narrower definition. I don't think we can say that somehow we, as humans, are the sole repository of all moral value, and that all beings beyond our species don't matter. I think they do matter, and we need to expand our moral consideration to take that into account.

2. A BBC2 program looks at farm animal character and intelligence:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1290899/were-smart-sausages-why-farm-animals-arent-really-dumb-look.html>

3. Vegetarian athletes and vegan body builders:

<http://www.veganbodybuilding.com/>

Gladiators were vegan:

http://bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2007/05_may/02/gladiator.shtml N.B.
High levels of strontium from their vegan diet healed gladiators' wounds and broken bones.

4. <http://www.nature.com/bjc/journal/v99/n1/full/6604418a.html>
<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE60E58N20100115>

5. See Note 2.

6. On Bonobos and Chimps' closeness to us:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/science-news/7858951/What-kind-of-man-are-you-chimpanzee-or-bonobo.html>

6. George Bernard Shaw:

Living Graves

We are the living graves of murdered beasts
Slaughtered to satisfy our appetites
We never pause to wonder at our feasts
If animals like men also have rights.
We pray on Sunday that we may have light
To guide our footsteps on the path we tread
We're sick of war we do not want to fight
The thought of it now fills our hearts with dread
And yet we gorge ourselves upon the dead.

Like carrion crows we live and feed on meat
Regardless of the suffering and pain
We cause by doing so. If thus we treat
Defenseless animals for food or gain
How can we hope in this world to attain
The PEACE we say we are so anxious for?
We pray for it over abattoirs of pain
To God, while outraging the moral law
Thus cruelty begets its offspring: WAR.

(Other great vegetarians: Leonardo da Vinci, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Pythagoras, Apollonius of Tyana, Confucius, Albert Einstein, Albert Schweitzer, Brigitte Bardot. N.B. Hitler wasn't; he ate sausages!!)

Appendix — Counter arguments:

1. *My doctor told me to go back to/continue to eat meat.*

Doctors are entrenched in conventional living. You will scarcely find one clergyman or doctor who recommends cruelty-free eating or who has even attempted it! Like most

people they have not overcome their addictions. They also believe in the protein fictions broadcast in the 20th century.

2. I need protein from meat.

All info promoting protein was spread first by governments supporting business — farming and food industries — or from ignorance. There is protein in legumes, grains, vegetables, fruit, nuts and seeds.

http://www.happycow.net/vegetarian_protein.html

3. I used to be vegetarian. I now feel better back on meat.

The soil is so depleted now you need to get vegetables full of minerals; rock dust provides mega vitamins. You probably needed to work out a better vegetarian meal plan. Joining in the prevailing meat fest is to join the human race as it is and I know it's easier.

4. Vegetables are alive too — what's the difference?

Go to an abattoir where they are cutting up cows then go to a vegetarian kitchen where they are cutting veg. Feel the difference. Ideally we could live on fruit, avocados, seeds nuts, grains, beans and pulses which do not destroy a plant, only the fruit casing or excess seeds. Such a diet was given in Genesis to Noah — I am loath to admit! There is a ladder of ascent in consciousness. Animals are more evolved than plants.

5. Diet is a matter of choice.

So are all crimes!

6. We have the teeth of omnivores.

We don't have the short gut of carnivores, but the long gut of herbivores. However, humans have adapted. We can eat human flesh with no physical ill effects, yet is this right?

On the health benefits of vegetarian eating there are many web-sites — see

www.vegsoc.org

www.veghealthguide.com

UN calls for World to go vegan www.viva.org.uk