

Eating Vegetarian to Save Our World

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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[[Master's Teachings](#)]

Tzu Chi has been promoting vegetarianism for years. Our campaign for vegetarianism started in 2003 during the SARS outbreak in Asia. Since then, Tzu Chi has encouraged it as an ongoing basis. We aim to raise awareness of the benefits of vegetarianism, such as mitigating global warming, nurturing people's compassion, and reducing collective negative karma.

Right now, global warming, climate change, and food shortages are big issues for the world. Carbon dioxide, methane, and other greenhouse gases are causing global temperatures to rise, and a significant portion of these gases come from animal agriculture. If people switch to a vegetarian diet, less livestock will be raised, leading to a reduction in greenhouse gases created by the livestock industry. Moreover, animals raised for meat consume a large proportion of the world's grain and water. With the human population increasing and shortages of food in some parts of the world, grains fed to livestock could be used to feed hungry people. Hence, eating vegetarian provides a solution to some of the pressing issues we're facing globally.

Eating a vegetarian diet also helps us to nurture compassion towards animals. The Buddha teaches us to "relieve the suffering of all living beings." This includes the lives of animals. Nowadays, animals raised for meat grow up in cramped spaces. Be it cattle or hens, they live in a confined space that may not even be big enough for them to turn around in. Animals are sentient beings; living in an inhumane environment for their whole life, they harbor hatred and resentment. We learn to be compassionate towards animals by wishing that their lives could be spared. More importantly, the act of eating meat not only involves taking a life, but allows us to become indifferent to the suffering of animals. When our heart is filled with indifference, there is no room for compassion to grow. When we have nurtured compassion for animals and keep a vegetarian diet, we are protecting life.

From Buddhism's perspective, eating meat creates the karma of killing. There is so much turmoil in the world. Take the example of the war in Syria which has led to the refugee crisis in Europe. See how many refugees are displaced by the war and how many of them are injured or have died. Why are there so many wars and armed conflicts in this world? An ancient saying tells us "to understand why there are wars and fighting in this world, go to the slaughterhouse and listen to the cries of animals." Humans kill 1,776 animals every second for food. Each day, over 150 million animals lose their lives due to the human craving for meat. In addition, millions of livestock are culled whenever there are outbreaks of livestock diseases, such as avian flu and foot-and-mouth disease. According to Buddhist belief, the killing of animals creates enormous collective negative karma and brings about the retribution of war and suffering. If there are no such killings of animals to satisfy human cravings, the world would be at peace.

Tzu Chi has been promoting vegetarianism for these reasons. For example, every year, in the lunar seventh month, we promote eating vegetarian to save the lives of animals that would otherwise be killed to make meat offerings. In 2016, we began a campaign to promote an [Ethical Eating Day](#)

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, encouraging people to go vegetarian for one day on January 11. At that time the idea was that if 1,110,000 people pledged to eat vegetarian on January 11, then Tzu Chi would propose to the United Nations that January 11 be designated as Global

[Ethical Eating Day](#)

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[Ethical Eating Day](#)

only calls for eating vegetarian on January 11, one day is not enough; we hope every person can make every day an

[Ethical Eating Day](#)

The Earth is our home. We want it to be a safe and peaceful place. Eating vegetarian can help achieve this. As more people in the world become vegetarians, the global temperature will be reduced, the extreme weather events we have been experiencing will also be less severe, and most of all, weather-related disasters will decrease in number. There will be less harm done to the planet. Also, with more people becoming compassionate, there will be fewer armed conflicts. I often use the analogy of a tug-of-war between good and bad. With global warming affecting the entire human population, we must get more people to join the team on the good side of reducing greenhouse gases. To eat vegetarian is to save the Earth. If we can successfully raise awareness of the benefits associated with vegetarianism, we can inspire more people to foster a sustainable environment, to purify our air, and to protect our Earth.

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks

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