

WORLD TRIBUNE MAILBOX

Meat, Murder, Moralizing and More

Editor's note: The essay about vegetarianism and Buddhism — "Want Fries With That?" — in our March 20 issue prompted more reader responses than any other article in recent memory. Because of the volume of letters we received, we are unable to print them all but have chosen to print an extended "Mailbox" column. Thank you to all who responded.

Having been a vegetarian for seven years, and now an omnivore, I found my health suffered from a strict no-meat diet; my metabolism is exceedingly fast, my frame is small, and I don't have the stomach capacity to eat the large bulky meals vegetarianism required. The current "meat is murder" fad is something I studiously ignore. If someone's personal choice is a no-meat diet, that's cool....

Eating or not eating meat is a choice that should be based on health and personal values; there is no right or wrong here, especially for followers of Nichiren Daishonin....

— JOE STEVENS, San Francisco

What do you mean you are "usually" a vegetarian [as Lisa Jones states in the author's bio]? You either kill animals or you don't. I know that killing may be a real "icky" prospect for some people, so they have it done for them, thinking they somehow will insulate themselves from the deed. Your uninformed, jaded article was tantamount to a three-pack-a-day smoker writing an article on the dangers of cigarettes. Your statements were ungrounded, incorrect and misleading. I protest against this kind of biased, inept "reporting" on such a critical and important issue. I will do my best to repair the damage you have done to members or people in general, who might have been considering making a change, a change that has saved countless lives, at whatever meetings I attend from now on....

— MIKE GILMORE, Seattle

What a great article. Thank you. I've been a vegetarian since before I became a Buddhist. It's been about 13-14 years now. It would be nice if you did a survey on how many in the organization are veggies and how many are thinking about becoming vegetarian or just plain eating healthy. I also think there ought to be a column in the *World Tribune* about health and fitness.

— ELEANOR J. DUPONT, St. Albans, N.Y.

Lisa Jones has addressed an issue which, to my knowledge, has no bearing on our practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and therefore no place in the pages of "the weekly newspaper of the SGI-USA." She correctly points out that there would be no benefit in practicing the ancient Buddhist precepts in modern times, according to Nichiren Daishonin himself. Unfortunately, neither she nor the *World Tribune* stopped there. The article and its accompanying information boxes go on to say, in essence, that maybe we should eat meat, maybe we should not, but as Buddhists we should deeply ponder the issue. This is nonsense.... We are, like most of the great apes, neither carnivores nor herbivores, but omnivores (even chimpanzees hunt and eat animals, including other primate species, along with insects, fruit, nuts and berries). Our teeth, our digestive systems and our lifestyles

Title: Mailbox: 05/01/98

Subject: World Tribune 05/01/98 n.3189 p.3 WT980501p03

Author:

Keywords: 05/01/98 January June Mailbox Opinion Tribune World

from prehistoric times to the present reflect this fact.... Our dietary habits may “warrant reexamination and new dialogue,” but not on the pages of the *World Tribune*.

— ANDY HANLEN, Long Beach, Calif.

I’m a vegetarian, but I never try to “preach” it to anyone. But on the other hand, I find that people discriminate against me because of my choice, even some of our leaders, which I think is a shame. I hope your article will increase the awareness that people make certain choices, and that’s OK.

— HEDIO LOBO, North Hollywood, Calif.

I loved your article! I’ve been a vegetarian (off and on, mostly on) for 17 years and a Buddhist for 12. I agree with freedom of choice — however, I’m glad you wrote this article because I deeply feel this is an issue that practicing Buddhists should at least THINK about, whether they agree, disagree or don’t care. People are so anesthetized to institutionalized killing — such as in the meat industry and even the death penalty. They may love to eat meat but disdain the thought of hunting or killing animals. They may embrace the sanctity of all life but feel capital punishment is just in some cases. It’s hard to let go of beliefs and lifestyles we’re comfortable with — and maybe it’s not even necessary. But I appreciate the opportunity for more dialogue on the subject inspired by your article....

— LAURA MCFARLAND, Austin, Texas

Perhaps we should remember, in our goal to obtain the same life-condition, that Nichiren Daishonin sacrificed his own health and nearly starved to death, rather than hunt, kill or inflict suffering on animals even for his own nourishment.

— ANDREA KOVACS, Greeneville, Tenn.

The reality is that it’s IMPOSSIBLE to rear animals for mass consumption without inflicting unspeakable misery — even small-scale farming involves castration, the separation of mother and young and, finally, the slaughter itself. Yes, plants may feel, too, but you’re missing the point. We cause harm with every step we take, but our goal should be to inflict as little suffering as possible within practicality. A practical place to start is the end of the senseless slaughter of millions of sentient beings. Beings who we know feel pain, joy and who desperately cling to life as much as you or I. I guess I can’t blame you for trying to justify your own eating habits, but I do feel it was completely irresponsible to lay this guilt-induced opinion on members who may have otherwise chosen the compassionate way.

— VIVIAN DOMINGUEZ, Seattle

Because meat is cruel to animals, destructive to the environment, polluting of the water, bad for human health and a huge cause of worldwide starvation, I think it should not be presented to children by those of us who are praying every day for compassion, wisdom and protection.

As Buddhists, we seek the middle way. We are praying to end the suffering of all sentient beings, and though we need not tell anyone to say no to meat, we surely ought not be telling them to say yes to it by serving it to children as if it were cruelty free. Meat is a violent tradition, just like war, and the SGI needs to teach children the truth about it in word and deed. Meat is unnecessary killing.

— SUSAN HENNINGER FETTA, Los Angeles

Title: Mailbox: 05/01/98

Subject: World Tribune 05/01/98 n.3189 p.3 WT980501p03

Author:

Keywords: 05/01/98 January June Mailbox Opinion Tribune World

The front page of a newspaper is very significant. I would prefer to see us lead off with articles like SGI President Ikeda's guidance or [General Director] Zaitu's article in this issue. It could also contain information that expresses the direction of the organization (e.g., annual theme, divisional reports, geographic reorganization, etc.). President Ikeda's guidance was on page 11, Mr. Zaitu's on page 10, meat-eating vs. vegetarianism on page 1. Priorities??

I have no issues with the information expressed in Lisa's article. But I really feel that it is not *World Tribune* front-page material.

— ZENOBIA D. ODIASE, Piscataway, N.J.

I eat meat, fish and fowl (in moderation) and do so with dignity and appreciation for my evolutionary niche as a homo sapiens omnivore.... In a world as complex and as imperiled as ours, acquiring a "respect for life" is unlikely to be found with a simple dietary decision. Discussion and careful consideration of such everyday matters, however, can certainly be a vehicle to better understand the core of how we conceive of ourselves as well as the fundamental effects of our actions. I applaud the *World Tribune's* efforts in promoting this. I suggest, however, that as Buddhists we try to avoid donning the mantle of self-righteousness, where simplistic views are propelled by a "sense" that we are absolutely right....

— BENJAMIN SCHOEPFLE, Chicago

Huge sections of the *World Tribune's* readership live in locations whose lifestyles and (in some cases) livelihoods include the production and consumption of meat. How can we in Nebraska — or, I imagine, members in Texas, Kansas, the Dakotas, Iowa, Illinois or Wisconsin, to name a few — give this issue of the *World Tribune* to our friends? Isn't it saying to them that they do not have true compassion if they don't refrain from eating other living things? What are they going to think the SGI is, when its organ newspaper puts such a picture and article on the front page?

— JIM CELER, Omaha, Neb.

Title: Mailbox: 05/01/98

Subject: World Tribune 05/01/98 n.3189 p.3 WT980501p03

Author:

Keywords: 05/01/98 January June Mailbox Opinion Tribune World