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More on diet -- Personal and Political Implications

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In her *Diet for a Small Planet*, 10th Anniversary Edition (Ballantine 1982), author Frances Moore Lappe' offers a convincing argument that the typical American diet of the late twentieth century is not only unhealthy for its consumers but the consequences of its production are environmentally destructive as well.

"We have been involved since about 1900," she charges, "in a great experiment in human nutrition." Advances in medical technology and rising expenditures for medical care notwithstanding, the life expectancy of a forty year old American male is now only about six years longer than in 1900. "Why haven't our wealth and scientific advances done more for our health?" Much of the blame, she argues, lies in the "new and untested" American diet of high fat, high sugar and low fiber - - which "medical authorities now link with six of the ten leading causes of death," chief among them being heart disease, cancer and stroke.

Her premise that the typical American diet -- high in fat and sugar and low in fiber -- is the principal underlying cause of these diseases is supported by evidence from studies of population groups which changed their diets. For example:

The traditional Japanese diet contains little animal fat and almost no dairy products. Japanese who migrate to the United



States and shift to a typical American diet have a dramatically increased incidence of breast and colon cancer.

The citizens of Denmark were forced to reduce their intake of animal foods by 30 percent during World War I, when their country was blockaded. Their death rate simultaneously fell 30 percent, to its lowest level in 20 years. Denmark's experience was not unique: in a number of European countries, where World War II forced people to eat less fat and cholesterol and fewer calories, rates of heart disease fell.

In some third world countries a small class of urbanites have adopted the new American diet over the last 20 years. Coronary heart disease now occurs more and more frequently in some of those countries, such as Sri Lanka, South Korea, Malaysia and the Philippines according to the World Health Organization. [page 120]

Reduced to its simplest terms, there are eight basic factors in the "new American diet" which contribute to health risk:

1. A shift to animal protein sources rather than from plants. Studies have indicated that diets high in animal protein show higher plasma cholesterol levels than those obtaining their protein from vegetarian sources. Added to this is the finding that high protein diets in general, tend to atherosclerosis or hardening of the arteries.

2. More fat. We have increased the fat intake in our diet by 27% since 1900. A distinction is made here between "saturated"

fats which contribute to cholesterol and heart disease and unsaturated fats. Saturated fats occur mainly in animal foods but are also found in some vegetable products such as palm and coconut oil.

3. More sugar. There is a well established link between sugar intake and tooth decay. Added to this risk is the problem that in satisfying our caloric needs with sugar, we deprive ourselves of the needed nutrients in more complete foods such as grains, fruits and vegetables.

4. More salt. Our diet is said to contain 6 to 18 grams of salt a day; 10 to 30 times the health requirement. Too much salt is a recognized factor in hypertension -- high blood pressure.

5. Less fiber. This factor has only recently been recognized as necessary to a healthful diet. Fiber is defined as "the skeletal remains of plant cells that are not digested by our bodies' enzymes." Fiber is important in the diet because it helps food pass more quickly through the intestines and promotes the growth of certain types of beneficial bacteria which act to break down toxins in the food.

6. More alcohol. Alcoholic beverages contain mostly calories -- the alcohol is converted to sugar in digestion -- but few other nutrients. Excessive use of alcohol causes cirrhosis of the liver. As a social problem, the widespread use of alcohol exacts a terrible toll -- half of all traffic deaths involve an alcohol impaired driver.

7. Food additives. These include chemicals intentionally added to "processed"

foods as preservatives, emulsifiers, artificial flavors, and colors etc., as well as Antibiotic residues (growth hormones in meats) and pesticide residues on fruits and vegetables. [The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is charged with protecting the public health in this area but there has been a history of much “conflict of interest” in its staffing -- with members of the food processing industry. ed.]

8. Too many calories. “Twenty percent of all Americans are either ‘clinically overweight’ or obese.” Dragging around extra pounds puts an added strain on the heart and contributes to high blood pressure. An overweight condition tends to inhibit and discourage physical activity, thus leading to a vicious circle of curtailed exercise and more weight gain. [One unexpected and very beneficial result of my seven week trip to India a year ago this month was that due to the combination of food restrictions in the form of irregular and barely adequate meals plus demanding exercise of daily bicycling, I lost 15 pounds -- down to 137 from 152. Back home, by maintaining the exercise regime and eating a healthful, basically vegetarian diet I have gained only one third of the weight back. ed.]

In view of the foregoing, one must ask; “If the American diet of today is so bad, why is this so? Who, or what is responsible? And what can we do about it, once the problem is recognized?”

The roots of the problem transcend national borders and involve multi-national economic systems in which the motive and rationale for the production of food is to maximize profit for those owning the means of

its production, processing and marketing rather than to provide a healthy diet for humanity.

It should be added here that a system of central planning and control by a government such as we have seen in the ‘Iron Curtain’ regimes of the past 40 years has proven to be even worse -- as we are now witnessing a catastrophic breakdown of food production and distribution in the Soviet Union in the present winter of 1990.

The first half of Ms. Lappe’s book is partly autobiographical and takes us along on her journey of discovery of the root causes of world hunger. Her in-depth investigation is *Theosophical* in essence because it searches behind the immediate evidence to discover the fundamental and underlying causes of malnutrition and hunger.

She relates how, in 1974, she attended a World Food Conference in Rome convened to blueprint a master plan to overcome world hunger. It was then that it dawned on her that the so-called experts were locked into the mindset that believed the problem of world hunger to be simply one of food supply versus demand and that it therefore followed that the only solution was to increase production.

“I slowly realized that those who have been schooled to direct the powerful institutions which control our economic system are forced to accept and work within the system that creates needless hunger. Beneficiaries of those institutions, they have been made incapable of seeing outside their boundaries. Rather than preparing them to find solutions, their training has inhibited them from asking

questions that could lead to solutions. Those supposed authorities ... were still promoting the belief that greater production would solve the problem of hunger, but I had come to see that you could have tremendous production -- indeed, I lived in the country with the greatest food abundance in history -- and yet still have hunger and malnutrition.”

[Leaving Rome], “I saw more clearly than ever that the real problems in our world - - the widespread and needless deprivation -- will never be solved by the government leaders now in power in most nations. ... I finally realized that the gravest problems facing our planet today can be solved *only* as part of an overall movement toward a more just sharing of economic and political power, not as separate technical problems. Thus, the solutions will come only when ordinary people like me and like you, decide to take responsibility for changing the economic order.” [p. 25]

Thus, by her analysis, the problem is not limited just to our evidently unhealthy American diet, it is part of overall malaise which is world-wide in scope. A common thread can be seen to link the overall Gordian knot and that is the concentration of economic and political power in the hands of the few at the expense of the many.

Living in a relatively free and democratic society, we have the means readily available to us to individually attack these problems at the personal level -- and as more and more of us come to recognize how we are being victimized directly by the power structures wielded by the few, we can take action to free ourselves for the benefit of all.

We can begin by:

1. Supporting food buying co-operatives instead of the supermarket chains, or at least shopping as much as possible at small independent markets which carry local produce,
2. Avoiding wherever possible buying highly processed food products and for them substituting raw food such as bulk grains etc.,
3. Avoiding the purchase of food products merchandised by food industry giants such as General Mills, Kelloggs, General Foods,
4. Eliminating animal meat from our diet.

Editor’s note: The above quotes and commentary are merely a partial overview of *Diet for a Small Planet* (10th Anniversary Edition). Readers are urged to read the book firsthand to fully understand the author’s presentation and the scope of the problem. It is hoped that your interest will be stimulated to explore this vital issue further.

News from New Zealand

Just received is a lovely Christmas card from Hazel Menehira who teaches Speech and Drama at the Rainbow Theatre Centre in Wanganui New Zealand. Hazel is a longtime friend with whom I attended Krotona School of Theosophy at Ojai California several years ago. She writes that she is now the president of the Wanganui Lodge and sends along news of her family and of her activities during the past year. Her group has been involved in international outreach activities for the past several years.

Upcoming in July 1991 are plans to host a group of 20 Russian school children there in the first phase of an exchange program, according to a clipping from the *Wanganui Chronicle*:

"At this stage it is planned 20 students from a Leningrad school will come to Wanganui in July for a month and be hosted by Rainbow Theatre. After their return, 20 Wanganui students from Rainbow Theatre will go to Leningrad for a month in August-September. Earlier this year Mrs. Menehira, director of Rainbow Theatre, took four of its students to England where they took part in an international production of Peace Child, which included a group from Russia. 'During the five weeks we spent in England on Peace Child we made firm friendships with the Russian Chaperons, all from Leningrad, and we decided to arrange a Wanganui-Leningrad student exchange,' Mrs. Menehira said.

During the month students would spend in Russia, it was intended that they would attend Kirov ballet and opera performances, a circus, visit a drama college, an arts college, visit the ancient Russian city Novgorod, the Petrodvoretz Palace and other places of interest.

The Russian students, all of whom spoke excellent English, would stay on a *Marae* [ma-ree; 1. a temple, altar, or sacred enclosure at which Polynesians worship. 2. an enclosed space or yard in front of a Maori house.], have a trip on the Wanganui River, visit Mt. Ruapehu and also attend performances at professional theatres. Mrs. Menehira said the students would have to do their own fund-raising for their air fares to Russia. 'It's a very exciting venture -- the only way to build peace is to get young people from different countries together,' Mrs. Menehira said."

Hazel is happily "following her bliss" as Joseph Campbell recommends and "loving what she is doing." She sends along the following "Recipe for a perfect hug":

HUG RECIPE

Ingredients:

2 People	A touch of love
4 arms	A pinch of humor
2 hearts	A sprinkle of glee

Directions:

Extend arms and wrap them around each other. Clear your minds, take a good look at each other, then pull yourselves together and mix well.

Serves two.

Bravo, Hazel -- keep up the good work. [Editor's note: We use this same Recipe at the Kiva Co-operative house and find that it works fine when tripled to serve six.]

We wish to thank Marty Lyman for the following *Rules for being human* and *Ten strong things* from the *Talmud*.

RULES FOR BEING HUMAN

1. **You will receive a body.** You may like it or hate it, but it will be yours for this time around.
2. **You will learn lessons.** You are enrolled in a full-time informal school called Life. Each day in this school you will have the opportunity to learn lessons. You may like the lessons or think them irrelevant and stupid.
3. **There are no mistakes -- only lessons.** Growth is a process of trial and error, experimentation. The “failed” experiments are as much a part of the process as the experiment that ultimately “works.”
4. **A lesson is repeated until it is learned.** A lesson will be presented to you in various forms until you have learned it. When you have learned it, you can then go on to the next lesson.
5. **Learning lessons does not end.** There is no part of life that does not contain its lessons. If you are alive, there are lessons to be learned.
6. **“There” is no better than “here.”** When your “there” has become a “here,” you will simply obtain another “there” that will, again, look better than “here.”
7. **Others are merely mirrors of you.** You cannot love/hate something about another person unless it reflects to you something you love or hate about yourself.
8. **What you make of your life is up to you.** You have all the tools and resources you need. What you do with them is up to you. The choice is yours.
9. **Your answers lie inside you.** The answers to life’s questions lie inside you. All you need do is look, listen and trust.
10. **You will forget all this.**

TEN STRONG THINGS Paraphrased from the *Talmud*

- Iron is strong,
but fire melts it;
- Fire is strong,
but water quenches it;
- Water is strong,
but the sun evaporates it;
- The sun is strong,
but clouds can cover it;
- Clouds are strong,
but wind can drive clouds away;
- Wind is strong,
but man can shut it out;
- Man is strong,
but fears cast him down;
- Fear is strong,
but sleep overcomes it;
- Sleep is strong,
but death is stronger;
- But strongest of all is love,
for love survives death.

RANDOM QUOTES

KARMA is like taking a full swing on a golf ball in a tile bathroom!
... Stephen Gaskin.

WE SHALL all learn to live together as brothers or we shall die as fools.
... Martin Luther King Jr.

Upcoming

For our February 11 meeting at the Park Hill Public Library, Gerald Lee will present a talk on Esoteric Healing.

Calendar

Friday January 11

Barbara Ginsberg's home -
: 696-0794 for directions.

Al Skrobisch leads the
continuing open forum
discussion on basic
theosophical concepts.
Meeting begins at 7:00
P.M.

Monday January 14
Park Hill Public Library.

Montview Blvd. at Dexter
St.

Jack De Mooy leads us
in study of Chapter II of
*Introduction to Esoteric
Principles*.

Take Colo. Blvd. to
Montview (2000 N.), 7
blocks E. to Dexter.

Meeting begins at 6:00
P.M.