

## Jainism and Jesus: A Dialog on Vegetarianism

Ankit Rupda from Gujarat wrote to one of our websites and his email was directed to me (Cathy Douglass) for response. My pen name in the internet ministry is Asha.

**Ankit:** *I am a JAIN, so I do not know many things about Christians. We believe that violence is the biggest sin in the world, while Christians don't believe in non-violence; that is the point which I don't like in Christians. Otherwise, there are many points in Christianity that I like. I totally agree with you that Jesus was an ideal of love, mercy and kindness. Yet Christians kill and eat animals for food. Animals have feelings and when you cut them, they hurt.*

**Asha:** I have read some literature by and about Jains, including a biography of Raychandbhai, who influenced Gandhiji. I have some close friends who are Jains so I am familiar with Jainism. Now you have talked about the issue of violence/non-violence. Yes, it is easy to see that that is the biggest sin which concerns Jains. Very much of the teaching and practice revolves around this concept. It can be at the heart of a great many other sins, so in a way it is justified to view it as central to all or most other sins.

You made the statement that "Christians don't believe in non-violence." This is a surprising statement, considering what Jesus taught. But I think I know why you say that. First, let's look at what Jesus and his apostles teach about violence/non-violence.

In the teachings of Jesus' apostles, love (which is the ultimate active non-violence) features very highly. Romans 12:9-21, written by Apostle Paul but inspired by Jesus, says, "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good... Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need.... Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse; Live in harmony... do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position... Do not repay anyone evil for evil... Live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge... If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Romans 13:10 "Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." You could accurately say, "Love is the fulfillment of the law of non-violence."

There are many more verses such as in Matthew 5:5-9, 5:21-24, 5:43-48, and Luke 9:51-56, but the best example of the non-violence of Jesus is in 1 Peter 2:25: "...Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made

no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

If you are searching for the Ultimate Guru of Ahimsa, you have found Him in Jesus. Not only did Jesus not hurt anyone, but he righted wrong through his suffering without complaining or retaliating. He actively lived out LOVE which precludes the possibility of violence or any other kind of sin. That is why I follow Jesus. He showed what God on earth should really be like: morally perfect without sin of any kind. And he did not achieve that kind of life by withdrawing as a hermit; he accomplished that kind of life while serving mankind selflessly, surrounded by not only disciples but unbelievers, skeptics, and enemies who hated him. There is not one other guru, saint, god-man, religious leader, who can come close to the life that Jesus lived.

So I ask you now, do you still claim that Christians do not believe in non-violence? These words are our holy scriptures and this is the life and commands of our Lord and Guru. But if you define non-violence as straining out gnats, sweeping the ground before us, not using insecticides, and being vegetarian, then no, you will not find those rules in the Bible. God, the Creator and ruler of the universe, has not told us that those things are important. When someone asked Jesus what is the greatest commandment, Jesus answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-39).

Okay, let's get to the real question: Why do Christians eat meat even though it means killing animals? Yes, animals do have feelings of pain when hurt. It would seem that killing animals should be a violation of the principle of not doing harm to others.

1. The Bible does uphold the principle of being kind to animals. Proverbs 12:10 says, "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel." When God created Adam and Eve, the first humans, at first everything was perfection with no sin. In that early stage God gave them the command to "rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Since there was no sin at that time, there would have been no death of any kind, so that command would have included preserving their lives and feelings.

2. Soon after being created, Adam and Eve rebelled against God and chose to disobey Him. This is the beginning of sin in the world, and every human being since that time has been born into sin. The Hindu prayer expresses it: 'I am a sinner, what I have done is sin; I am under sin, I am the worst of sinners. Save me, O Lord of Sacrifice.' Even the Vedas testify of the need for sacrifice to take away sin. It is SIN which has brought death into the world. The result of Adam's

and Eve's sin was that instead of living forever in a perfect earth, they began to die and now every human and other creature is born to die. This is fair punishment for our rebellion against God. It is OUR DOING which has brought death into the world, and until God re-creates the earth into a new perfect state again, we do live in a world where death and pain are inevitable, for man and beast.

3. While earth was perfect, God gave Adam and Eve only vegetables and fruit to eat. Genesis 1:29 says, "Then God said, 'I give you [Adam and Eve] every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth... I give every green plant for food.'" This is how God originally intended for living things to eat - both man and animal ate only vegetable matter. Tigers and other creatures that today are carnivorous ate grass! All insects would have been helpful, not harmful. i.e. if there were mosquitos, they were harmless and didn't carry malaria parasites, etc. Man and animals were not afraid of each other. Everything could function perfectly for good and not for harm in that perfect state of existence.

4. After sin and death entered the world, sometime later God changed the order of things. Animals became carnivorous (meat-eating). Harmful bacteria and parasites entered the world. Sicknesses affected all life-forms from human to plant. At that time, God decreed a change in the way man and animals related to each other and a change in man's diet also. He PERMITTED (not required) humans to eat meat. Genesis 9:1-6 says: "Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth...; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting... from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.'"

Meat eating will not be part of the future perfect earth that God will re-create after Jesus comes back to earth as King. What God has allowed, we humans have no right to call sin and to feel superior if we refrain from something that is not sin. You may choose to be vegetarian for the sake of not hurting animal life. And it is possible to eat nutritiously without eating meat. But you have no authoritative basis to judge other humans for doing something which God has permitted them to do and call it wrong.

Being vegetarian is fine, but it will not bridge the gap between you and God that sin has created. You see, you cannot erase one single wrong thing you have done or thought merely by doing an act you consider to be good. Whether the sin is telling a lie or killing an animal, sin breaks our relationship with God.

Remember the prayer that says, 'Save me, O Lord of Sacrifice'? Our Creator God had to become the sacrifice himself that would save us from sin. He did that in Jesus Christ. Jesus is God in human flesh, come to earth to sacrifice himself, to die for our sins.

Take this illustration about sacrifice. Long ago in India there used to be animal sacrifices (and still are in some places). But eventually the priests realized that people could not afford animal sacrifices and they began objecting to the taking of animal life anyway, so a substitute sacrifice was found: the coconut. The coconut became almost universal in rituals and still is today. The dirty brown outside represents the ugliness of sin. The coconut milk, protected from outside pollution, is pure and clean. As the coconut is broken by a hammer pounding on it, the milk pours out, cleansing the worshiper. In the same way, Jesus was hammered onto a cross, pouring out his pure sinless life-blood for us who are covered with the dirt of sin. The coconut is a symbol, Jesus the "Lord of Sacrifice," the true Son of God, is the reality.

Ankit, think about this: What good does it do for a religion to boast that they have the strictest rules, when not one of its members can keep those rules? (A Jain leader once drew criticism from Jains for flying to US when he was invited to preach on Jainism – yet jet travel kills countless innocent creatures). Actually, Jesus summed up the whole of God's standard for man when he said, "BE PERFECT, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Whatever our manmade rules are, God's standard is perfection. No one can measure up to it. Clearly, we need more than religious rules. What we all need is the forgiveness for our sins that only Jesus can provide.

**Ankit:** *You say that God has not specified anything about eating meat, but you should think that God is the father of all the creatures. Do you think that a father can allow his one child to eat another child? You have so many other things to eat, why kill & hurt the feelings of your brothers?*

**Asha:** You may feel that we are discussing a single issue - whether eating meat is right or wrong. But this issue does not exist apart from a complete worldview about the nature of God, his relation to man, and even how we get truth. Truth is defined as "that which conforms to reality." Your argument that "God is father of all creatures, therefore one child cannot eat another child" - it sounds sensible on the surface, but does it conform to the reality that God himself has declared? It is almost funny to think that a finite creature like man can set up another Reality in contradiction to that of the Almighty God! So when you say, "but you should think" it is clear that your view is that God's word, God's declaration of reality, is not important in this matter, only what we think matters. So what is wrong with your reasoning? The Bible's teaching is that all creatures are not of the same kind. We are not all children in the same "family". God the Creator declared that he created man as the pinnacle of creation, the only thing created "in the image of God" - with body, soul, and spirit - able to have relationship with God.

Ankit, every creature is going to die, including man, animals, and insects. Since God has created things in part to serve the needs of man, then whatever is healthy and nutritious for us may be eaten safely. Not eating meat will not prevent the death of one single creature. And once dead, they feel no pain. We are not causing extra pain to creatures by eating meat. In fact, raising animals for consumption, they are given better and more protected life in order to be commercially valuable and edible than animals which are allowed to roam in the streets, procreating, eating garbage, uncared for, untreated for disease, and causing disease to humans. All of this I have seen in every city of India I have been to, including Rajkot. Even careful slaughtering is quick and nearly painless, in comparison to allowing animals to die of diseases and old age.

Animals have nervous system so they feel pain and also possibly fear. Because of this, no one should kill without reason or in an inhumane manner. But animals do not have morals. They have no sense of right or wrong, they are not created with that capability by their Creator. Therefore there is no injustice in the animal kingdom. If you claim it is wrong for humans to eat meat, what about carnivorous animals like lions and tigers? Why are you not preaching to them about not eating each other? You don't preach to the tigers because they are obviously of a different "kind" than humans. We are not brothers with the animal kingdom. Why would it be wrong for us to kill and right for them? The whole vegetarian philosophy gets impossibly bogged down with questions about stepping on insects, using pesticides, and not eating underground vegetables, which actually do not have more or less germs about them than above-ground vegetables.

I have nothing against vegetarians and am perfectly happy to allow vegetarians to go on with their food habits on the basis of compassion toward animals. I have never and will never try to convince a vegetarian to become non-veg. The problem is that these are man-made rules and as such they do not promote closeness to God. They are nothing but personal preference based on sentiment and not on scientific fact or spiritual reality.

Has any human ever lived who keeps every rule in their religion? Has any person lived a whole lifetime without committing a single sin? I believe the answer is No. No human has ever kept every single moral law for an entire lifetime. Far from it, we are sinful every day. The point is this: then what good does it do that one religion has one more rule than another? Or ten, or a hundred? If we cannot live up to even a few rules, making more rules does not change our hearts, does not make us closer or more pleasing to God, does not make us better people, does not bring us more peace. Rules, philosophy, and laws only make us aware of God's standards. Rules do not give us the power to obey them. In Jainism you have no saviour but only rules. Keep your rules, they are fine, but come to Jesus for forgiveness, power, peace, and salvation.

As the prayer says, "O God, from the Unreal lead us to the Real, from darkness lead us to the light, from death lead us to immortality." Is this your goal and prayer, Ankit? If so, then you ought to give serious consideration to the God who said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6). We are all born into that state of unreality, darkness, sin, limitation, ignorance, fear, death. We need God to lead us out, we cannot lead ourselves out or save ourselves. God sent Jesus into the world as His avatar, His incarnation, to lead us out. When we accept his salvation, we experience true freedom from sin and true power to live.

If these things are what you are pursuing in life, then you have every reason to put your faith in Jesus as Lord and Creator of the universe. Only when you are in right relationship to your true lord and creator can you be in right relationship to the rest of creation, including yourself and all others around you.

Try subscribing to The Yeshu Samaj channel in YouTube. It has many interesting videos relating Hindu concepts to Jesus and His teachings. Why not have a look and tell me what you think?

(**Ankit** replied that he and his brother eventually watched the *JESUS* film and liked it so much that they both downloaded the entire Bible into their mobile phones!)