

Vegetarianism for Dao Cultivators

- Principles
 1. Respect for life and nature
 2. Reduce suffering of sentient beings
 3. Reduce harm to life and nature
 4. Reduce waste

Vegetarianism is not just a diet—it *is a lifestyle*. It encompasses not only what you eat but also what you say, do, and even think. It is a holistic approach to cultivation.

1. Respect for life and nature

The Buddha, saints, and sages all tell us to be unconditionally compassionate, to love all life. We must treat all sentient beings with respect. You cannot draw a clear line between discrimination towards other species and discrimination within our own species. Once you have discrimination of any kind, it is inevitable that you'll cross the line. The reason that the enlightened ones say to respect and love all life is that they all have a God-given nature, and that is what makes all life beautiful and worthy of our respect.

So how do we reconcile the fact that plants are also living? Plants are not sentient life—their nature is just to grow when the conditions are right. They do not feel and do not sense their surroundings like sentient life does. Their only reactions are to grow towards sunlight and to adapt to environmental conditions according to their plant nature.

So when we eat plants, we are not taking the life of a living being. I would put plants in the general category of “nature,” which includes the air, soil, rocks, water, etc. As living beings on this planet, we are a part of nature. Unfortunately, to survive we need to eat, and when we eat plants we must be grateful to Heaven for having such things to eat.

The difference between eating plants and eating other sentient beings is that plants do not have a spirit or soul. Eating a plant will not create any karma with the plant. However, eating other sentient beings will create bad karma with such sentient beings, because sentient beings have an animal nature which can sense and feel emotions. Emotions such as fear and anger can lead to hate and vengeance. These emotions can be manifested by the spirits of all sentient beings.

We shouldn't just respect others' right to live, but we must also treat others with the respect they deserve. The law of cause and consequence, which is a fundamental law of nature, dictates that we reap what we sow, that we will be treated the way we treat others. So from this perspective, it is clear that how we treat others will have a direct effect on how we ourselves are treated. Just remember that when we say and do things to others, it is like saying and doing things to the image of ourselves in the mirror. Enlightened beings have all come to realize this—that all sentient beings come from a common origin and are in fact inseparable from each other and the origin. Therefore, we must treat others as we would treat ourselves.

“A human being is a part of the whole, called by us the 'Universe,' a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest - a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us,

restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security.”—Albert Einstein

2. Reduce suffering of sentient beings

As we must nurture the virtues of compassion for all, it only makes sense that we try to reduce suffering whenever and wherever it may exist. Therefore, we should also prevent the suffering in the first place. Raising animals for food can cause suffering for the animals, especially on today’s factory farms where they are subject to truly inhumane treatment. One might argue that free-range animals are raised without suffering. This may be true, but the ultimate goal of raising such animals is to kill them before their natural end of life. This is capital punishment for the innocent animals which have committed no crimes. Where is the justice in that? Is it okay to just kill these animals and thank Heaven for such fine food? You may not realize what Heaven’s intention is for these animals, but surely you must realize that the animals are not willing to be killed. Part of animal nature is the instinct to survive, to avoid suffering, and to avoid untimely death. Therefore, should we not respect animals’ right to live peacefully?

The real problem is that we treat animals as objects and products rather than living, breathing, feeling (sentient) beings. It is a mistake to equate the life of animals to the life of plants. As explained earlier, plants do not have a soul and are not capable of harboring emotions such as hate and vengeance. If we understand plant nature then we will realize that plants are in fact intended by God to be the source of our sustenance.

Then you have to wonder what the purpose is of sentient beings having an animal nature and a spirit. Enlightened people will realize that God is giving us a hint that we should treat all sentient beings with respect and definitely not kill and eat them. The law of cause and consequence makes sure that there is justice when we do break the laws of Heaven (e.g., thou shall not kill). All sentient beings are given the ability for vengeance. Therefore, it would be foolish to pick on animals because you think you are superior and they are defenseless. Everything is relative. However, justice is absolute. In this life, you are the master, but in the next life, you may be the slave. What can be fairer than that?

Therefore, by causing suffering for others you will only bring the same suffering to yourself.

“The question is not, Can they reason? Nor, Can they talk? But, Can they suffer?”—Jeremy Bentham (18th century British philosopher)

3. Reduce harm to life and nature

As we are one of many sentient beings and also a part of nature, it would do us no good to harm other life and nature in general. We all share the same planet—air, water, land, and other resources. So our welfare and the welfare of others are inextricably linked in this ecosystem. We do not live in a separate ecosystem from all the other living beings on the planet. The air and water that we pollute not only harms us but all other living beings as well.

Vegetarianism for Dao Cultivators

To take this one step further, the planet as a whole is also a living entity comprised of living beings and nonliving things. There is a natural balance based on natural laws. When things are out of balance, nature will try to bring things back into balance. But it may do this in ways that we do not understand (e.g., calamities). By considering the analogy of a living biological organism such as the human body, when the chemistry or Qi gets out of balance, the body gets sick. When the body is sick, it tries to restore the natural balance. In the case of biological attack by bacteria and viruses, the body produces antibodies to fight back. The same thing happens on a global scale. We think of nature as being inanimate or not alive. But the forces of nature will correct for any imbalance that we cause. The corrective actions taken by the forces of nature can be calamitous for sentient life. This is yet another realization of the law of cause and consequence. The more we do to harm nature, the more we will bring about harm to ourselves in the future—this is the inescapable logic of nature.

“What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.”—Confucius

4. Reduce waste

Waste not want not. The cause of waste boils down to a lack of appreciation and gratitude for the things that we have. We also think that we can waste because there is plenty. For example, about three quarters of the planet is covered in water. So is it safe to say that we’ll never use up all the water? Now fresh water is a different story. Even though there’s plenty of water in the oceans, we can’t live on the salt water. Fresh water is a much more limited supply, and when nature is pushed out of balance by our activities, we can have either too little (drought) or too much (flood) water.

There’s also the matter of the law of cause and consequence. If we waste food, resources, etc., we will only suffer the consequences of not having enough in the future (could be in the next life). Another way to look at the law of consequence is as a balancing mechanism—as a way to revert back to the mean. Confucius talks about the doctrine of the mean. By following the path of the mean—doing what’s proper/right in every situation—we avoid the extremes and imbalances (the cause) which result in the corrective actions (the consequence).

“Nothing will benefit human health and increase chances for survival of life on Earth as much as the evolution to a vegetarian diet.”—Albert Einstein

By following these four principles in everything we say, do and think, we can avoid creating bad karma and prevent calamities and environmental disasters. We must overcome the ignorance, foolishness, laziness, attachments, and selfishness that enslave us to continue down the wrong path. We must realize and manifest our humanity—this is our greatest gift of all, both to ourselves and to others.

“Humanity (仁) is the distinguishing characteristic of man. As embodied in man’s conduct, it is called the path of truth.”—Mencius

“The love for all living creatures is the most noble attribute of man.”—Charles Darwin

“Mankind differs from the animals only by a little, and most people throw that away.”—Confucius

- Everything is tied to that fundamental natural law—the law of cause and consequence.
- Vegetarianism is the foundation for successful cultivation.

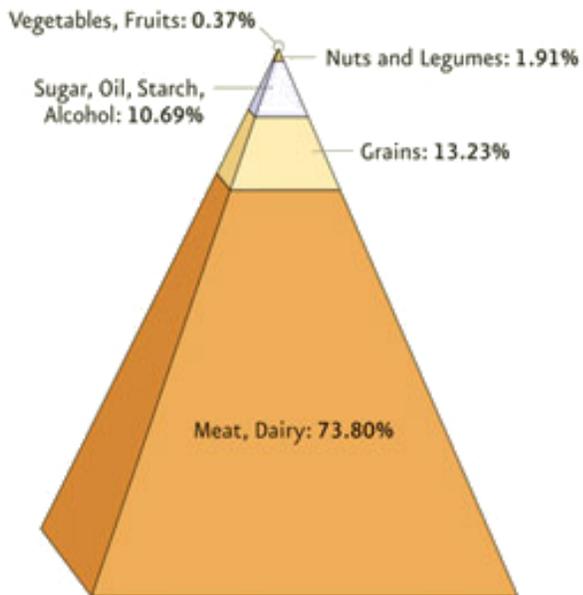
Vegetarianism for Dao Cultivators

- The principles and our goal are absolute, but the realization or practice may not be.
- We have a choice, use it wisely

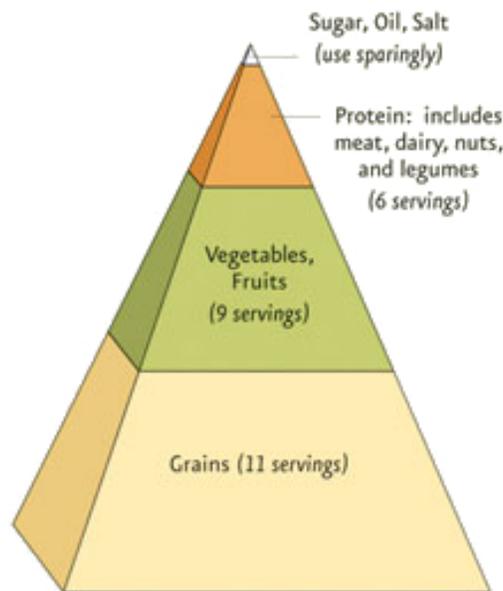
“True human goodness, in all its purity and freedom, can come to fore only when its recipient has no power. Humanity's true moral test, its fundamental test, consists of its attitude towards those who are at its mercy: animals. And in this respect humankind has suffered a fundamental debacle, a debacle so fundamental that all others stem from it.”—Milan Kundera (20th century Czech author)

Why Does a Salad Cost More Than a Big Mac?

Federal Subsidies for Food Production, 1995-2005⁸



Federal Nutrition Recommendations



Raising and eating animals for food has a negative impact on health and the environment:

1. Cause of illnesses—eating meat is shown to increase the risk of cancers and other diseases; virtually all (over 99%) food-borne illnesses (caused by bacteria) are associated with meat
2. Waste of food—producing a pound of animal protein requires at least 6 pounds of vegetable protein; 70% of US grain goes to feed animals raised for food
3. Waste of water—producing a pound of animal protein requires 100 times the water used to produce a pound of vegetable protein
4. Waste of land—87% of US farm land is used to raise animals for food
5. Toxic waste—animals raised for food produce 130 times the amount of human waste, and the waste is toxic (poisonous)
6. Greenhouse gases—animals emit greenhouse gases like methane (28% of US emissions) and carbon dioxide; overall CO₂ equivalent emissions from raising animals for food accounts for about 5% of the total and rising
7. Karma—this is a less verifiable effect, but the killing of over 10 billion land animals (only in the US) for food annually is creating a lot of bad karma