

Nutrition
and the
inner sense of giving

Heinz Grill

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The spiritual meaning of food

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Foreword

There can be few fields in life with as many contradictory theories and recommendations as the field of nutrition. Every year another diet, wonder-food or potential killer is discovered. The more we learn about nutrition, the more confused we become. Should we avoid carbohydrate or eat it as a rich source of fibre? Should we eat unsaturated margarine, or natural butter? Should we avoid dairy foods or are they necessary for the calcium?

Here is a book with a different approach. It teaches us how to develop a feeling for food and sense its nature for ourselves, so that we no longer need to rely solely on other people's theories or dogmas about nutrition. The thoughts in these chapters are intended to accompany our own exploration of different foods as we observe them, taste them and build a relationship to them. Instead of overloading our heads with yet more facts, we can open our hearts with a new kind of sensitivity. As we develop our own inner perceptions about nature and the different foods it offers us, our souls are nourished as well as our bodies.

Heinz Grill is a spiritual teacher and author of nearly 30 books, which offer a spiritual insight into a vast array of topics ranging from yoga to the nature of mountains. His words have the very special quality of carrying not only information, but profound wisdom and love. The words are food for the soul. Upon reading them we feel touched in an inner place – a place from which we can feel deep appreciation and gratitude. This is the inner sense of giving. We no longer need to put our own health at the centre but instead can focus on developing a giving relationship to the various foods themselves. As our own inner wisdom grows, the many contradictions which arise from scientific thinking are often resolved.

Karen Patterson
Caroline Pick

August 2006

A holistic understanding of nutrition – spiritual individuation

In order to understand nutrition and the inner meaning of food in a holistic sense, consideration must be given to the development of the individual I-consciousness. The I-consciousness is the awareness of the self. It can touch the depths of our inner nature and so the all-encompassing essence of life, but it can also be superficial and only strive for success and self-affirmation.

As success is so sought after nowadays, questions about nutrition are also answered from a very intellectual point of view. This means that we do not recognise the value of food with gratitude in our hearts, but are always looking for yet more theories about calories, minerals, vitamins, protein, carbohydrate and so on.

A holistic consideration of nutrition needs to include the spiritual dimension, for alongside the physical body the individual has a soul-plane and moreover the infinite nature of the spirit. The soul is anchored in the individual through the consciousness. Yet we must first struggle, through meditative insight, to the depths of our nature, in order to experience ourselves as beings who have a consciousness.

In the last decades, the saying “You are what you eat” has been the keystone of most nutritional teachings. But the thoughts that follow give a wider perspective. The saying could be somewhat altered to read “You are how you relate to food”, for no-one can eat happiness and contentment. There is not just one aspect to nutrition, but many. It has a central role in life. Gradually getting to know the different aspects of nutrition and their profound meaning is a process of maturing which helps us grow in a holistic way. A new life emerges, one which we did not know before, and we experience it as a joyful and yet subtle sensitivity. This life is born when we develop an understanding of spiritual reality.

Probably everyone seeks contentment, appreciation and self-affirmation. We want to find truths everywhere to satisfy our inner longing for fulfilment. As a result many people look in the field of nutrition for something right which also makes sense. But the nutritional principles which are discovered cannot alone provide a satisfactory answer, for the actual question is an existential one, of how people relate to food and so to a higher order.

If people develop further through deeper, meditative awareness, they will choose simpler nutrition than is common in our countries. The study of such an important field of life as nutrition requires great attention, discernment, knowledge and sensitivity. We will struggle increasingly for more and more insight. We will touch ever new dimensions of understanding. One day the moment will come when we have a clear awareness of something much deeper in the soul. Then we will notice there is no answer in the outer world. We will not find the truth in the right form of nutrition, but will experience gratitude for nature in our hearts and so sense the answer.

Life has many, many forms of manifestation and expression. Naturally there are also many, many teachings about nutrition. The basic principles of the teachings are often very different. Macrobiotics, a holistic teaching from Japan, has become very well-known here. Followers of this approach allow only cooked food. Raw fruit and salad are only eaten as exceptions. Those who look more deeply into the literature on macrobiotic nutrition will find many truths, but in all the teachings they will not find the answer to the deepest question in their souls. A great contrast to macrobiotics is the raw food diet, which is advocated by many nutritionists. They teach that food should always be eaten in its natural state, that is to say, raw and they give many reasons to support this. The various books about raw food give very rational explanations. But now the serious question remains as to what we should believe, and ultimately we ourselves have to come to a decision about what we should eat.

Clarity and understanding in the field of nutrition will only be found when we have realised our essential aptitudes and abilities in life. The maturity of the individual is determined by knowledge. If people understand life through recognising its nature, answers are found in the depths of the soul. If this independent, active path of knowledge does not take place, a teaching is only understood and practised as a dogma, as something external. Great strength and autonomy is needed to keep the heart free of outer creeds and principles.

The scientific research of the last decades has brought humanity much insight and progress. Research into food and the physiology of digestion is very important. But development is in a constant state of progression. A new epoch is dawning. Only now do we have the possibility of understanding on deeper levels and so recognising something greater in life.

The broad field of nutrition is sought out by many people as an opportunity to shape life in a positive way. Discussions focus specifically on improving

health and choosing the right food. Most teachings about nutrition are based on the physical plane. Only a few texts try to point out the connection with soul and spirit. Now the thought therefore needs to be developed from quite another standpoint, so that directly through the study of nutrition the consciousness can grow into that notion of an unlimited world. For in our time there is a movement over from external, visible phenomena to a dimension which is invisible, but nevertheless truly present. This is spiritual individuation. It begins when individuals recognise their inner nature and so the spirit as the actual power which supports life. So the words written here should touch the heart and help people recognise something deeper and more subtle behind the visible phenomena, for everyone carries spirit within. Right at the start it must be acknowledged that the study of nutrition is not merely about learning nutritional guidelines, but that something silent in the soul resonates alongside, giving warmth for the thinking and subsequent activity.

These words should not be understood as a new teaching about nutrition. Rather they should extend existing nutritional knowledge in a way that directly expands the consciousness. All the insights can only mature through true understanding. If we learn to understand nutrition, we will experience life in a new way. A word should come to life in the depths of the heart, and central to this is the consciousness.

Eating, preparation, choice

When considering nutrition, it is important to recognise the individual as a being with consciousness, for only when we appreciate the life of the consciousness can our contemplation come alive and approach reality. Throughout our lives we constantly evolve into higher dimensions of understanding. The way people know and see things changes several times during the course of their lives and so the way they relate to their surroundings and their activities also changes. The many inconsistencies which exist in the field of nutrition disappear if we look more deeply into an order which exists naturally. Before making a decision about whether food is good or bad, it is important to order our priorities.

Eating, preparation and choice are essential in this order. A teaching of nutrition which overlooks the way food is prepared is incomplete. It is also incomplete if the way we eat and behave at the table are not taken into consideration.

Choice of the right food is most intensely discussed nowadays. All nutritional teachings relate to the question of health, being solely concerned with physical well-being. Their principles carefully divide food into categories of “healthy” and “unhealthy”. From an inner perspective the choice of food is recognised as a basis for physical growth but also for the harmony of the soul-life. The right choice of food brings order, balance and a sound foundation in life. This is the first step towards leading and shaping life in a conscious way.

But often people are restricted when it comes to choosing specific foods. The vegetables they want cannot always be obtained in good quality. In foreign countries this is often very difficult. Behind all the material order in life there exists an invisible order which is much deeper. It is of spiritual origin. In order to recognise it and look at further connections we must be able to free ourselves from outer conditions.

We must attribute the second and far more important meaning of nutrition to the way food is prepared. Those who react sensitively in their souls will perceive the subtle difference between a cook who prepares a meal with a loving touch and one who works hastily and impatiently.

The whole of the past lives in our food in silent stillness. The plants we eat grow in nature and through the light of the sun. People handle them, giving

them a sensitive, invisible tone. It will never be irrelevant whether the cook hacks at the vegetables like firewood, or cuts them in a loving way. How the pots are handled, the cleanliness of the kitchen and the use of heat are all aspects to be mastered in more than just a theoretical way. The cook should be able to combine practical abilities with theoretical knowledge. Furthermore he or she needs sensitivity and a sincere wish to prepare the meals with a careful and loving hand. The way food is prepared is crucial in encouraging that energy which influences not only the physical body but also harmonises the mind, giving people the strength to be calm and peaceful.

So alongside the choice of food, the meaning of cooking and serving should not be forgotten. As long as the food we buy is not rotten or bad, the harmony in preparation should be valued more highly than the choice that has gone before.

The highest step is the act of eating.

As beings with consciousness people are part of the solar system. If they recognise themselves in the great entirety of the cosmos as sparks which are not separate from the great fire of life, they will never become attached to matter through binding actions. Eating gives them a powerful opportunity to recognise and to experience their freedom, for in eating the consciousness is alive. Eating should never be a mechanical activity. It should always mean conscious dedication and conscious experiencing. The powerful opportunities contained in the activity of eating will only be realised in the future. At present eating is perhaps a beautiful activity and is welcomed by us all. The more conscious we are of ourselves, the more we recognise our dependence on nature and on our food. Gratitude can shine out of the soul. Eating can become something sacred. A life with strength and love can grow through becoming conscious of the deeper meaning of eating. This awareness that eating takes first place, that it is to be valued more highly than the choice of foods, will only awaken after a long period of dealing with life itself. Just as our life matures constantly, so nutrition will continue to reveal new possibilities. The highest revelation is gratitude. It is felt in eating.

Eating and giving

Eating is giving. It is the highest kind of activity, for we approach the threshold of the spiritual world. Through the consciousness it is possible in eating to witness directly the limitless realm and experience ourselves with gratitude as part of the universe.

Giving has a very far-reaching and profound meaning. The word cannot be defined superficially, for giving is not a matter of a visible action but of a deep process of consciousness. It needs to be more closely understood. The outer action of eating is the expression of an inner will. Each individual has the need to eat, just as each has the urge to participate actively and personally in daily life. An inner, unconscious wish is connected with every activity. But in everyday life we do not normally experience the underlying quality of an action which is directed outwards. Giving in its true nature lies beneath the visible threshold. It can only be understood in the heart, like a deep human impulse of love.

By simply observing our own personal characteristics and those of others we can gain a sense of how some aspects are connected: a person with a good appetite feels well, on the other hand if nothing tastes good, something is wrong in the soul. When others have a healthy appetite, it also gives us pleasure, whereas when people reject food we are easily hurt. A quite essential inner aspect of human existence is connected with eating, for those who enjoy their food affirm life. This affirmation of life gives encouragement, it refreshes the whole environment, it can brighten the minds and hearts of others. In eating, acceptance is shown. Eating is appreciation of nature, the cook, our friends, our loved ones and life.

This affirmation of life is a first, important step towards a contented life. But nowadays quite the opposite is the case: despite great prosperity and high scientific achievements, people are constantly striving for more goals and ideals. Secretly they feel the inner emptiness in the outer abundance. Only if the values and ideals of the individual touch deeper planes again will the paths open to further development.

In order to understand the deeper sense of giving we must consider the experience of taste more carefully. Each food has a specific component of taste. In eating we might enjoy a sweet or a spicy taste. At the same time this sensory

perception is also sensed more deeply within and evokes a certain feeling-experience. Particularly in eating, feelings are involved in a lively way. We often speak of sensuous eating. However, to understand the giving aspect we must look very deeply into human nature and clarify the difference between perception and feeling, for each expresses something immensely different. The meaning of giving lies in the deeper world of perception. The opposite, taking, lies in the outer, sensual quality of the feelings.

People are given the senses as life-organs. A cosmic power lives in the senses. With our eyes we see our surroundings, with our ears we hear tones and sounds, through the nose we smell the air with each breath and through our sense of touch we feel forms and objects. The senses themselves can perceive, they cannot, however, judge or decide. Their task is of an entirely passive nature. Depending on how developed the consciousness is, an individual will work with the impressions of the senses. Food is tasted on the tongue and the nervous stimulation immediately leads the impulse on to become a feeling. This feeling usually determines whether the food is judged as pleasant or unpleasant.

Everyone naturally craves a pleasant taste-experience, as it creates a feeling of gratification and satisfaction. But feelings can be expressed in very different ways. Depending on our state of mind we will eat respectfully or greedily. If people find access to the inner world of the heart, giving develops. Desire by contrast is a very outer feeling which is bound to the physicality. Perception in the heart, however, is a most sincere sensing and so is free of any desire. It is a loving, free thought of giving. To sense in the inner realm means going outwards and sensing the other. The different impulses which live in people's world of feelings can be bound to their own longing or they can become free. In deep sensing, which is revealed as gratitude, people are freed from the heaviness of their own wanting. In desire they are bound to their own impulses and then only see themselves.

The sense of taste is by nature free and can be freely experienced through inner awareness. When people taste a meal, they consciously take part in their outer world and so also take into themselves a much wider sphere of their surroundings. The senses could not perceive the outer world if the infinite light of life were not fully present within them. With the sense of taste we perceive not only the food in its aroma and its consistency, but also connect with the existence of life. When food touches the tongue, a direct connection is made to an infinite world of becoming and perishing, to the growing,

blossoming and withering that lives in the whole of nature, for in eating people take nature directly into themselves. Through the conscious perception of the senses a bridge is built between their own being and the outer world. If people become conscious of this process from the depths of their souls, their hearts will blossom with every mouthful.

The silent wish to give is deeply anchored in human minds and hearts. Yet most people live very superficially in their feelings and so are bound to an outer wanting, which overshadows the inner world of the heart. How many people eat from anxiety or worry, or use eating as a way of passing the time? In doing this they bind themselves to outer feelings and so become dependent on their own physicality. This then contradicts their inner nature and the food will make them ill. By living in an outer feeling, in seeking our own well-being, we desire, we take. In this desiring there is no growth and no true affirmation of life, for affirming means becoming aware of ourselves and acting with inner participation and attention.

Giving is never possible in an outer feeling. It is only possible in the deep perception of the heart. Everyone carries this deep power of perception within and everyone also has the possibility of enriching their life with a deeper note. The power of the heart is to give. Through pure perception, love for life is born. A feeling is bound to desire and with this is dependent on outer moods. Perception on the other hand is a breath of love, which lives not only in the depths of the soul, but is transmitted to others, to nature and the whole environment. A healing power streams out of this innermost human realm.

Everybody longs for harmony and security. It is just that people unfortunately seek it all too often in the wrong place, for they cannot find the values of a higher order in the universe in the outer world of feelings. In outer moods they cannot become aware of the magnificence of eating, for eating is not something inconsequential, it always means profoundly accepting and acknowledging tasks and duties. Eating is an activity which we must all do whether we wish to or not. We must recognise our dependency. A long chain of tasks performed by human hands, as well as the effect of the natural forces of wisdom given in nature, are necessary for every foodstuff. The bread would not be on the table, if the baker were not to carry out his trade. The baker in turn could not bake the bread, if he were not to get the grain from the farmer. And the farmer could not harvest the grain, if the forces of nature, like sun, wind and rain, did not nourish the crop and enable it to grow.

Many things are recognised with the help of science. It is only our own dependency that we barely recognise. Nutrition has been researched from so many aspects. Theories stand alongside theories, truths alongside truths. The invisible, which lives behind all manifestation, behind the vitamins, minerals, protein, carbohydrate and so on, is of quite another nature. It is life, it is spirit. It is this life that we must call back into our consciousness. It opens the more subtle life of perception in the heart, and the thinking also becomes open and alive. Conscious life is always connected with the essence of giving. We will not feel the boundaries of mine or thine, of sensory pleasure or suffering, but we will experience gratitude.

It would be very wrong if we were to deny the prosperity of today with its abundant wealth of foods and choose a path of asceticism. But moderation is important. Natural foods must certainly form part of the diet. But those who have already chosen simpler food with a high proportion of vegetables and grain should not stop exploring the meaning of life further. With inwardness and a deep receptivity, eating can be experienced in a new way. The more deeply the perceptions touch the heart and the more clearly an understanding of the order in the universe grows, the more clearly life is revealed in its limitless abundance. Then even a simple diet will not be restrictive, for inner abundance lives in the heart. Eating can lead to highest devotion, to devotion to life, to God.