

Healing the Planet with a Vegetarian Diet

Since I like quotations let me start with one of Albert Einstein: “You cannot solve the problems by the way of thinking that had led to them”.

I see to-day’s problems in close relation to the gigantic consumption of meat. My presentation is titled “Healing the planet with vegetarian diet. Eating meat kills the planet, so the slogan must be: “Change the way of thinking, lets create a vegetarian future”

When the last person will have understood that we are not allowed to kill and eat animals a lot of problems will vanish by themselves.

There is a saying that you serve mankind by helping people to get enlightened, or to cook a good soup for them. I am a practical woman, so I present myself as being a “soup-cook”, which also is true since I have written more than a dozen books about vegetarian cooking, animal-and-environmental welfare.

- *Let me tell you how I became a Vegetarian, thirty years ago.*

There were two pathways that led me there. The first was my mother’s rheumatism. Against this rheumatism she got pills – all tested on animals – which finally caused her liver cancer and painful death. I assumed a relationship between our family’s diet and her illness, which of course was denied by the doctors. After the war the whole family was happily devouring meat, sausages, sugar, white flour – all the things which a famous nutritionist calls “Üppige Mangelernährung, which means “opulent but at the same time nutrient deficient”.

At the age of thirty I got rheumatism myself. Naturally the doctor said I had inherited this from my mother. I got the same pills, but after a while realized that nothing got better, and that I would probably end up like my mother.

Fortunately in the meantime I read some books of other famous nutritionists, changed my way of eating into a wholesome vegetarian diet and so got rid of the symptoms.

The second reason, maybe even more important was that I started to live on a farm. It became impossible to eat all these animals that I got friendly with – my neighbours sheep I could not imagine roasted and served on a plate with green beans –impossible from then on.

I started to write my first vegetarian recipe book but wanted to know more about the scientific aspects of vegetarian nutrition so I underwent an education to become a health consultant. I gave up my career as an actress during which I had played main parts in 45 international films and on stage, all the neurotic women in world literature.

From then on I concentrated on informing people about the relation between nutrition, animal – and environmental welfare and hunger in the so called third world.

There is a close relation, so I not only chained myself with a group of other people in the Berlin pharmaceutical company – “Schering” in order to protest against vivisection on animals, but was also arrested because I protested against cruise missiles and other harmful life-destroying weapons.

Animal welfare and human welfare is indivisible.

In 1989 topics in the media very often said: “Polish people are starving, Bulgarian and Russian people are starving because they cannot buy any meat nor sausages or sugar”. I wondered why people should starve and even die because they are not able to buy foods which I do not need at all. I suggested to a Bulgarian friend, a doctor that we present this wholesome vegetarian culture in Bulgaria. So we did. I went to Bulgaria with some household grain-mills and we arranged cooking demonstrations for doctors and cooks and also the public in Sofia and the Black Sea, finally in a town near Sophia called Bansko with a population of 10,000. This little town Bansko after a while turned out to become a model for the whole of Bulgaria. First we printed a little brochure containing the most important facts and recipes of the wholesome vegetarian diet. This brochure was handed out to doctors, cooks, media and people at large.

Then I organized that the mayor of Bansko, a baker and a business man were invited to Salzburg in Austria where I lived so that they could study soft tourism (*agritourism*), baking full grain bread and cakes and the construction of household grain-mills. At the same time Austrian organic farmers collected and donated 15,000 kilos of grain, vegetables and potatoes, which we sent to Bansko, so that 123 poor old people, who otherwise would have died by starvation could survive the winter.

Help to poor countries should always mean “ help to self- help”. When I came to Bansko for the first time, a housewife had to pay 90 Lewa for one kilo of meat, but only 3 lewa for a kilo of grain – at a monthly income of 800 Lewa. So instead of one kilo of meat she could buy 30 kilos of grain. Imagine how a family can be cheaply fed this way. But people did not know it – although the grain was available they were asking for meat, fixed on the idea they would starve to death without meat.

Wholesome vegetarian eating is not only healthier but also more economic, and very often the only salvation. By changing the way of eating people frequently attain a more conscious lifestyle altogether. Since the President of Bulgaria is a Vegetarian, there is hope for more understanding, but it is not easy to change the mind of the population since all east European countries food is traditionally based on an enormous amount of meat.

Anyhow, some of the results that have occurred in the meantime are:

1. the foundation of the Bulgarian Vegetarian Union
2. two doctors lowered the meat consumption of the Bansko population by 20%.
3. Dr. Iliev, President of the Bulgarian Acupuncture Union, weekly informed through Sophia newspaper about healthy nutrition: Less meat – less sugar – less salt. The Bulgarian magazine called “Meat and Meat Products” announced that since 1989 all over Bulgaria the consumption of meat and meat products has diminished eight times. Remember we started our campaign the same year, namely 1989.

Next aim: A station where disabled persons and saved animals can heal and treat each other.

After the success in Bulgaria I flew to Moscow to see Michail Gorbatshev, who at that time was governing Russia. Again I brought household grain-mills as a present for his Clinic for the children suffering from the Tschernobyl accident. But plans for introducing vegetarian diet for these children could not be carried through because Mr. Gorbatshev lost his job.

So I wrote the brochure “Green Recipes for a Blue Planet” which first became translated into Bulgarian language. 3,500 copies were given free to interested people. Unfortunately this plan could not be carried through because Gorbatshev lost

I would like to draw your attention to a point which very often is not taken into consideration, that is: avoiding meat and meat products and dairy products does not necessarily mean healthy nutrition. At the vegetarian Congress in Thailand in January 2000 I was astonished how many vegetarians, especially Vegans, eat products which imitate meat without considering how many chemicals they might swallow without getting the necessary minerals and trace minerals which are in natural foods. We call this unhealthy way of eating “pudding vegetarianism”.

I think all nutritionists worldwide agree about one point – nutrition should be as natural as possible. Which amount should be eaten raw or whether only fruit should be eaten, or whether an egg is allowed in between – of course laid by a free and happy hen – I think about that question we should not fight.

What is important is the vegetarian lifestyle, nothing of dead animals, better vegan of course.. This should be the maxim of the future.

Each day 100,000 people die of starvation. One just have to bear in mind: Approximately 7-10 kilos of plant protein are needed as nutrient for the animals to produce 1 kilo of animal protein!! This means a waste which is intolerable. All 6 billions of people on this earth could be fed by a vegetarian diet, which by the way does not require any genetic engineering.

CONCLUSION: Vegetarian diet would make us healthier – a lot of diseases are self-inflicted, caused by the wrong nutrition. In Germany each year 60 billion dollars are spent to treat this kind of diseases.

A vegetarian diet would mean the end of the terrible factory farming of animals, would stop environmental pollution, the devastation of the rainforest and could finally bring an end to hunger and starvation in the so called third world. Nowadays still the cattle of the rich eats the bread of the poor. Even from poor countries, even from the poor Sahel zone in Africa, Europe imports soya to feed the cattle. So eating is no longer a private matter, but politics. By the way one eats one contributes to destroy the planet or one helps to heal it.

But nature starts to defend itself it seems. All the nutritional scandals of the last years – salmonella, pig pest, Mad Cow Disease, the dioxin scandal, the bird sickness seem to be what an American doctor calls, “the revenge of the animals which have been eaten”.

A new proof is the climate change which is going to become a catastrophe. But it seems people are finally waking up.

For the timer being I am a member in the Bavarian parliament, as such speaker for nutrition, consumers and animals welfare in the green party. Two days ago I arranged an event in the Bavarian parliament titled “ Saving the climate – also by fork and knife”, with almost 200 enthusiastic people, who at the end were treated with a gorgeous vegetarian buffet – all of them by biological origin , all products out of the season and out of the region, which is very important also for saving the climate.

Even if a lot of people stopped eating meat only because of health reasons, this means progress. They have started to think, to become conscious.

I put my hope into the children. A photographer told me that after reading my cooking books his whole family became vegetarian – and his little four year old son one day asked his father: “is it true Daddy that there are people who eat meat”.

I am an optimist – I still hope for the quantum leap. Maybe the new millennium, the Aquarius will bring it. The science of numerology says that the number one, which governed the last millennium, was the symbol for a masculine, aggressive energy, whereas the number two stands for a soft feminine energy, which will bring freedom, quietness, patience and cooperation. And all these many zeros in the number 2000 stand for tolerance and trust, so let us hope.

The chaos theory says that the movement of a butterfly’s wing can evoke a tornado at the opposite end of the earth. Even I, as a tiny little cell of cosmos am important and I bear the responsibility for the whole.

Let’s remember: “When many little people in many little places make many little steps, then the world will change”.

Barbara Rütting