

### *Simply Heavenly The Vegetarian Diet— Reflections and Recipes*

**O**RIGINALLY, CHRISTIANS, like their Jewish spiritual antecedents, the Essenes, were vegetarians, but in time the insistence on a vegetarian diet became confined to the monasteries. One of the most interesting monastic “relics” of the early Christian era is a letter written by a monk of Egypt to one of his disciples who had gone to Alexandria on some project and there had begun to eat meat. Learning of this, the monk immediately wrote to him, exhorting him to return to his vegetarian ways, reminding him that in Paradise Adam and Eve had been told: “Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat” (Gen. 1:29). This being so, the monk wrote, those who aspire to return to that pristine state of purity and communion with God must eat the diet of Paradise while on the earth in order to prepare themselves to regain that lost blessedness.

Although at times, especially in the West, this ideal was forgotten, whenever there was a resurgence of spiritual consciousness and reform among the monastics, the absolute first principle would be that of total abstinence from animal flesh (including eggs) in all forms. Usually this abstinence would be extended to dairy products as well. In the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches this principle is still evident in the requirement for



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all Orthodox Christians—lay as well as monastic—to totally abstain from meat, fish, eggs, and dairy products on nearly all Wednesdays and Fridays, as well as all days in the seasons of abstinence, such as the forty days of Lent and Advent. In the Oriental Orthodox Churches these days of abstinence comprise more than half of the calendar year.

But many of the Eastern Christian monastics—and some non-monastics as well—prefer to observe this abstinence all the time. This is because in the Eastern Church such abstinence is not regarded as penitential self-denial or “mortification of the flesh,” but rather as an aid to interior prayer (*Hesychia*-The Silence). The Fathers of the East taught that diet had a formative influence on the mind—which they saw as a field of energy, not merely the physical brain, which they considered to be only the organ of the mind. They observed that some foods made the mental processes (movements of noetic energies) heavy, whereas other foods made the mind light and quick in movement. Topping the list of “heavy” foods were all animal proteins, including dairy. In contrast, vegetables, grains, and fruits—the food of Paradise—were seen to make the mind fluid and able to grasp the subtleties of spiritual thought and experience

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*This article draws upon the wise and wry words of Abbot George Burke in his book *Simply Heavenly!*, the Monastery Vegetarian Cookbook. It is available from St. George Press, 1482 Rango Way, Borrego Springs, CA 92004*

(*theoria*).

In this approach to vegetarianism they were maintaining the principle to be found in the Aramaic text of the *Evangelion Da-Mepharreshe*, the oldest text of the Gospels known to exist. There, in the Gospel of Luke (21:3 4), Jesus says most forthrightly: “See that you do not make your minds heavy, by never eating meat or drinking wine.” In our own century, Saint John of Kronstadt (+1908) wrote that the more we live in the spirit the less will we live on animal flesh—the implication being that those who live fully in the spirit abstain completely from animal food. Saint John, a non-monastic parish priest, insisted that his spiritual children abstain at all times from animal foods, thus keeping a perpetual lent. Those priests who were under his spiritual aegis did the same in relation to those under their spiritual care.

Now that more detailed—and honest—research and information regarding diet and health are becoming widely spread, many clergy and laity of the Orthodox Church who had previously held an indifferent attitude toward observance of the traditional rules of abstinence are realizing the wisdom of the ancient ways.

So much excellent material has been written on the material and spiritual “why” of vegetarianism that I will not add any more here. (I would, though, like to recommend four publications: *What’s Wrong With Eating Meat*, by Vistara Parham, *Diet For A New America*, by John Robbins, and my two booklets—*The Four Soul Killers*, and *Spiritual Vegetarianism*.)

But I do want to say a word about the quality of vegetarian food—at least what I think it should be.

From the first day I became a vegetarian I have been convinced that vegetarian food should not just be healthy in a theoretical sense and eaten like medicine, but that it should be really good food—in taste and appearance. In fact, since it is better for us than non-vegetarian food, it should taste even better than non-vegetarian food. Accomplishing that is not so simple. This cookbook [*Simply Heavenly!*] is a result of more than twenty years’ endeavor to do so.

One of the best ways to motivate others to consider becoming vegetarian is to feed them good

vegetarian food. I am glad to say that by means of the recipes in this book our monastery [Light of Christ Monastery, Borrego Springs, CA] has done so for many years. And so can you. Every recipe in this book has been put to the ultimate test: eating! We always eat together with those who attend our Sunday church service, so we cook several experimental dishes for the Sunday lunch. Then we vote on whether or not to pass them on to you. This way I can make sure that each recipe that goes into this book is one that produces really good food, and not just some mediocre mess that can get by merely because it does not nauseate the eaters. That may seem strong language, but I am increasingly unhappy with the low quality of the recipes that usually appear in vegan publications. Why a vegan should be subsisting on fare that would have been dished up in the Cro-Magnon era when dad’s spear missed the bison is beyond me.

When I quit eating meat the quality of my food got better—not just from the health aspect, but from the flavor aspect as well. No longer relying on a main dish of death to distract the attention of the diners from the insipidity of the vegetables, I had to get competitive with the carnivore cooks—of which I had been one. And I easily surpassed them, much to their and my surprise. Things went along quite well for years until it became evident that a vegetarian had to be just that—and dairy needed to be eliminated. The result was that we “ate better” than ever before.

So much has been written on the subject of vegetarian and vegan diet that there is no need for it here. The proof is in the eating and in the resulting health benefits.

#### Flour

Most recipes in this book call for unbleached white flour. This may be surprising to some, but whole wheat flour is often simply too strong in its taste and interferes with the desired flavor. Although unbleached white flour does not contain all the nutrients of whole wheat flour, it is not devoid of food value. Bleached flour, however, is both worthless and poisonous.

#### Gluten

Gluten is the protein of wheat (flour) that

remains when the starch is washed away in water. Gluten is sometimes referred to as “seitan,” although that is a Japanese term properly applied only to gluten that has been flavored with soy sauce.

Gluten can be made into a variety of meat substitutes that are an ideal means of supplying healthy protein to the diet—something all vegetarians need just as much as non-vegetarians. Two-thirds of a cup of raw gluten supplies 56 grams of protein—a little more than the recommended daily allowance for a 167-pound man. Also they are a boon for those of us who are frustrated with the way so many commercial meat substitutes contain egg albumen. And they are much, much less in cost than the commercial substitutes, too!

Gluten is usually to be preferred to Textured Vegetable Protein (TVP), because TVP is made using a chemical process to separate the soy flour from the soybeans. I was told by the owner of a health food store (who refused to sell TVP) that Hexane, a poison, is used in the process. Organic TVP made in a non-chemical manner is available from: The Farm, Summertown, Tennessee, 38483.

Many vegetarians who feel an aversion for meat dislike the idea of eating non-meat substitutes that look or taste like meat. This is quite understandable, yet meat substitutes can be of great value. For one thing they can demonstrate to meat-eaters that there is an alternative to animal flesh. They also make it very easy for people to make the transition to vegetarianism, since they can keep on eating the kind of dishes they have been used to for much of their life.

Meat substitutes are often the only tactic a person has to convince spouse or children that vegetarianism does not mean grazing out in the back yard. For no matter how delicious and creative vegetarian dishes can be, there are some who just cannot believe they are eating “real food” if it does not include meat—or something very like it. I am not theorizing. Through the years we have helped many individuals and families to become vegetarian by means of these meat substitutes. Although our personal motives for diet are based on what we feel are bed-rock principles of health and spiritual development, not many share those ideals—at first. But serve them up a “meat” dish that is even

better than “the real thing” and you have them more than halfway to taking what a friend of ours; called “the first step to wisdom”: a vegetarian diet. It is results that count.

With these recipes vegetarians can continue using the dishes they liked when they ate meat. As I have said, they are also excellent means of convincing non-vegetarians that they can “live” without meat, and they can help beginning vegetarians make the transition to a non-meat diet.

By using these meat substitutes the family cooks can also keep right on using the same recipes and the same cookbooks they have all along. When meat is called for—no problem!

Raw gluten, unflavored and uncooked, will keep only one day. It should not be frozen.

Once gluten is cooked, any that is not going to be used right away should be frozen. It will keep indefinitely and can also be refrozen.

Unfrozen cooked gluten can be kept, refrigerated, for up to one week.

Dishes containing gluten can only be kept as long as the “life” of the other ingredients.

Gluten should be stored in airtight containers.

Those who have trouble with gluten can make just about all of the meat substitutes given in this book by using an equal amount of tofu that has been frozen, thawed, pressed, and cut into slices or pieces and then cooked in the flavoring broth.

[Of the over one thousand recipes contained in *Simply Heavenly!*—which includes an extensive twenty-two page index—including salads, unmeat dishes, broths, casseroles, tofu dishes, gravies, sauces, pasta, and desserts, we have selected the directions for preparing gluten and two unmeat recipes, since these may be of particular interest to the reader—Ed.]

#### Basic Gluten

*Don't let this intimidate you. It is easy after you have done it once.*

*Do not use pastry flour in this because it does not have enough gluten to work.*

8 c. Whole wheat flour

8 c. White flour

6 c. Cold (not chilled) water

Mix the flour and water together and knead it for

about 10 to 15 minutes, adding water or flour as (if) needed, until you have a very smooth ball of dough with no cracks in it. Kneading is what develops the gluten. It should bounce back when you punch it.

Put this ball of dough in a bowl large enough to hold it and add enough cold water to cover the ball completely. Let it soak under water for one-half hour at least, preferably one to two hours.

Then begin kneading it under water, kneading out all the starch and being careful to hold the gluten together. Change the water when it gets quite milky from the starch, and keep changing it until the water stays almost clear. The last part of the kneading should be done in a colander (not a strainer) under running water.

If the dough disintegrates in the kneading-washing you must try another brand of flour.

Cook according to one of three methods [given in the book].

#### TAMALE PIE

- 2 c. UnBeef, ground [cooked gluten]
- 1 c. Onions, chopped
- 1 c. Bell pepper, chopped
- 1 T. Corn oil
- 2 1/2 Tomato sauce
- 1 1/2c. Corn
- 1/2 c. Black olives, chopped
- 1 1/2 tsp. Sucanat
- 1 tsp. Sea salt
- 4 tsp. Chili powder
- 1/2 tsp. Garlic, minced
- Dash Cayenne pepper
- 1 c. Yeast Cheez
- 3/4 c. Cornmeal (yellow)
- 1/2 tsp. Sea salt
- 2 c. Cold water
- 1 T. Non-dairy margarine

In a large skillet, sauté the gluten, onions, and bell pepper in the corn oil until tender. Stir in the tomato sauce, corn, olives, Sucanat, salt, chili powder, garlic, and pepper. Simmer 20 to 25 minutes, or until thick. Stir in the cheez and mix thoroughly. Put in an oiled 9x9x2 baking dish. Stir the cornmeal and salt into the cold water. Cook and stir until it is thick. Add the margarine and mix well.

Spoon this over the UnBeef the dish and bake at 375° about 40 minutes

#### UNCHICKEN POT PIE

- 1/4 tsp. Unbleached white flour
- 1/4 tsp. Sea salt
- 1/2 tsp. Black pepper
- 1/2 tsp. Garlic powder
- 3 c. UnChicken, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
- 2 T. Corn oil
- 1 1/2 c. Onion, chopped
- 1 c. Carrots, sliced
- 1 c. Celery, sliced
- 2 T. Water
- 1 c. Peas
- 3 T. Non-dairy margarine
- 4 c. Mushrooms, sliced
- 1/4 c. Unbleached white flour
- 1 tsp. Sea salt
- 1/4 tsp Sage, powdered
- 1 tsp. Garlic powder
- 1/4 tps. Thyme
- 1/2 tsp. Paprika
- 1/4 tsp. Black Pepper
- 3 1/2 c. UnChicken Broth [given elsewhere]
- 1 Unbaked pie crust shell, and a top crust (Convent Pie Crust recipe)

Combine the flour, salt, pepper, and garlic powder. Toss the gluten cubes in this and coat them well. Saute the gluten in the oil until golden. Stir in the onion and cook 3 more minutes. Add the carrots, celery, and water. Cover and cook, stirring frequently, until the carrots are just tender. Remove from the heat and stir in the peas. In a saucepan sauté the mushrooms, covered, in the margarine until they are soft. Stir in the flour, salt thyme paprika, and black pepper, and cook 3 minutes more. Whisk in the broth and simmer, uncovered, for 10 minutes or until thickened. Mix the gravy into the gluten and vegetable mixture and put the rest aside. Put the gluten vegetable mixture into the pie shell, put on the top crust, seal it, and cut several slits in it so the steam can escape. Bake at 400° for 20 minutes, reduce the heat to 350° and bake 20 to 30 more minutes until the crust is well browned. □