

“In Praise of Plants as Food”

A Lay-Led Service

October 3, 2021

Welcome and Lighting of Chalice - Moria Merriweather & UUFES Youth

Welcome. Here we seek justice and truth and understanding.
Here we celebrate life and contemplate mystery.
Here we seek healing and wholeness. Welcome, all.

Centering - “Ancient Mother” (traditional Navajo prayer)
UUFES Music Director Shana Aisenberg and Betsy Ginsberg

Shared Affirmation

Hymn - “For the Beauty of the Earth”

A Time for All Ages - Alice Posner

Hello, happy autumn, and cold nights, I hope you are getting cozy at home! Take a moment to get comfy. Because today, the one and only “Very Hungry Caterpillar” is here to lead us through a journey of mindful eating.

However you choose to eat, whatever makes your individual body feel healthy, and what feels right to you in your interactions and actions of interconnection with your home, your regional, and our global food scape... The VHC is here to invite you to slow down, to a caterpillar’s pace, masticate- chew it over, and breathe, and celebrate with joy our bodies, and the gifts of the food we eat.

So as I read this familiar-to-most simple tale – and adapt it here and there – I invite you to close your eyes, perhaps, and become a caterpillar for a few minutes. You might want to try curling up then stretching out at the end for some kinesthetic reinforcement, and we can celebrate together the humble and spectacular journey to... transcendent joy!

In the light
of the moon
A little egg
Lay on a leaf.

One Sunday morning, much like this one,
the warm sun came up and (mouth pop) -pop!- out of the egg
Came a tiny and very hungry caterpillar.
He started to look for some food.

On Monday
He ate through
One crisp apple.
But he was still
hungry.

On Tuesday
 He ate through
 Two pears, ripe and silky...
 But he was still hungry.

On Wednesday
 He ate through
 Three plums,
 Right out of the icebox- delicious, so sweet, and so cold,
 But he was still
 Hungry.

On Thursday
 He ate through
 Four strawberries,
 Still covered with droplets of morning dew...
 But he was still hungry.

On Friday
 He ate through
 Five oranges,
 Tart and eye opening...
 But he was still
 Hungry.

On Saturday
 He ate through (with great relish)
 One piece of chocolate cake, one ice cream cone, one pickle, one slice of Swiss cheese, one slice of salami,
 one lollipop, one piece of cherry pie, one sausage, one cupcake, and one slice of watermelon.
 That night he had a stomachache!

The next day was Sunday again.
 The caterpillar ate through (sigh)
 One nice green leaf,
 And after that he felt
 Much better.

Now he was not hungry anymore - and he wasn't a little caterpillar any more. He was a big, fat, wonderful caterpillar. He built a small house, called a cocoon, around himself. He stayed inside for more than two weeks. Then he nibbled a hole in the cocoon, pushed his way out and...He was a beautiful butterfly!

Introduction - Moria Merriweather

Welcome to a wild experiment – a worship service about the joys of eating plants – which could mean eating **SOME** of our food as plants, **MOST** of our food as plants, or – for some of us – eating **ALL** of our food – exclusively as plants.

Let me first mention why this is a wild & risky journey. Two big reasons:

1. **FIRST** The topic includes vegetarianism and veganism. Even the words vegetarian and vegan are provocative – often provoking defensiveness, divisiveness or hostility. And we note here –

defensiveness and hostility are not generally considered conducive to worship, worship where we want to evoke togetherness, openness, thoughtfulness. Could such a messy topic be worship?

2. SECOND: Plants as food is not really a single topic— it includes many topics— topics like health and nutrition, the environmental costs of producing different kinds of foods; our relationships with plants and animals; and much more. There is FAR too much material –

And yet, in spite of these complex and troubled waters, we are setting out with the hope that we will explore some interesting territory and that we will manage to have some sense of companionship or even fun.

There are MANY reasons we could want to have a service about plants as food. Here are a few:

- Food is a meaningful part of our lives, and plants are a meaningful kind of food
- A number of us UUFESians are on a plant-centered path
- And many of us know people who are veg or vegan or flexitarian or trying to eat more green vegetables
- Many religions view vegetarianism as an important spiritual practice –
- Eating is a significant form of connection with life
- We might want to bring the topic into our UUFES community for more dialog

Or maybe it is more personal for me: maybe because for years and years I have been struck by how life-giving, health-giving, and otherwise WONDERFUL eating mostly plants or only plants has been for me as my life practice – and I rarely have a rooftop from which to sing its praises.

There are many words that describe a diet that values and centers plant foods, a few of them are: vegetarian, vegan, plant centered, WFPB....Today we celebrate some of the ways that plant foods bring joy and meaning to all of us, regardless of whether they are part of our overall diet, most of our diet, or all of our diet. Several people will share brief reflections on the joys and rewards of plants as food. I am grateful to all of them for their generous sharing.

Reflections

Ann and David Wilkins: Our nuclear family of four has been vegetarian for more than 30 years, inspired in part by a week-long stay with a Hindu family in India in 1988. As we dined with them, the mother stood at the head of the table and explained how each ingredient in the food she had prepared would nourish us in different ways.

It was inspiring. Within a year, we four had become vegetarian. Now, two sons-in-law and two granddaughters later, the eight of us delight in our vegetarian cuisine together and we agree that we feel the benefits in our bodies, in our minds, and in our hearts.

Peggy Polo: After a couple of years of slowly transitioning, I now embrace a whole food plant-based way of life. Eschewing animal flesh, dairy, and fish has vastly improved my physical, as well as spiritual health. I read books such as *The China Study*, watched documentaries such as "Forks Over Knives," listened to podcasts from reputable doctors and people who regained their health and vitality due to this way of life. Knowing that I am not contributing to the slaughter,

suffering, and exploitation of my fellow sentient beings, and that in my small way I am also contributing to the health of our planet, is good for my spiritual health. To quote legendary naturalist Sir David Attenborough, "We must change our diet. The planet cannot support billions of meat eaters."

Shana Aisenberg. I first became vegetarian during my early 20s, cooking recipes from *Diet for a Small Planet* and other cookbooks. I studied with Edgar Stanistreet, an inspirational 80-year-old musician, teacher, vegan, who promoted the benefits of his raw foods diet. I tried this for a few months, but found it difficult to maintain.

In Rabbi Arthur Waskow's 1995 book, *Judaism for the Rest of Us*, I read the term eco-kosher, and how we might interpret original intentions of kashrut laws for our modern times. Being more aware of where our foods come from, impacts of factory farming, chemicals, and climate change.

While there have been times, even for a few years, that I've strayed from being vegetarian, it has always remained my ideal. A couple of years ago, I felt drawn to return to a primarily vegetarian diet. During this time, more and more of my meals are completely plant-based.

I especially love cooking meals with local veggies, including some grown by friends or myself. Everything tastes so much better, I'm supporting local farmers, and most importantly, making choices in harmony with my values.

Musical Segue - "Fields" by Shana Aisenberg
(Composed for a Rodale documentary on organic farming)

Lynn Hatch. As a self-professed omnivore, I was intrigued by Moria's call for reflections on plants as food, specifically the benefits to life, spirituality and joy. Plants as food that benefit life.

Of course! Just this August, Harvard researchers "discovered" a molecule, lingnan, found in plant-based foods that reduces heart disease. Science! I get all that, but to consider plants as food and their benefits to spirituality and joy? That gave me pause.

On further reflection, consider the rainbow – the rainbow of colors plants offer up us. Consider the textures, leafy greens, crunchy carrots, seeds, and nuts. And then the flavors fresh from the garden, tomatoes, cucumbers. Fresh picked blueberries.

Mother nature appears on our dinner plate. Ah, my great spiritual healer and the wisdom that brings me great joy in my life at this present moment. Yes, that's it!

Eve Goss. For almost six months of each year, I collect fruits & vegetables from my own garden. I find it very satisfying to grow my own veggies because they are really fresh, and I can eat them raw if I want to. They are grown the way humans grew food for thousands of years, that is, by following Mother Nature's rules, the original "organic" food. As I pluck berries from the bushes, I am reminded that humans have been doing this for millions of years.

Since plants have been around a great deal longer than humans, they have qualities we can learn from them. Plants bend with the wind. Plants have devised ways to conserve water when it is

scarce and survive when nutrients are short. Plants (trees & flowers) help us relax and expand our thoughts. They nourish us with both physical and spiritual food.

Margaret Rieser. Have you ever tasted something that takes you back, connecting you to a particular time, place or person?

I recently remembered my father going out to the garden with the salt shaker that never left the kitchen table to eat tomatoes, warmed by the sun. "They're still breathing," he said, with a grin, pleased with his clever turn of phrase.

I love feeding myself and others with food I've grown in my garden. Sustenance and connection. A collaboration between the earth and me. What more could I ask for? And every time I bite into a sun-warmed tomato, I think of my dad.

Joys & Concerns - "Ballade" by Claude Debussy, played by Eve Goss
With Worship Associate Margaret Rieser

Hymn - "Spirit of Life"

Meditation/Prayer - Margaret Rieser

Let us take some time to deepen our sense of presence, to really slow down and to try and sense this present moment. Together.

Spirit of Life, may we walk beside those who need a listening ear, or a strong shoulder. May we feel connected to those in our community who are feeling lost, mistreated, scared, or sick. May we open our hearts to sense and share the love that is always present, although sometimes hidden.

Spirit of Life, sing in my heart. Guide us as we find the strength to care for the earth, our beautiful home, the place that nurtures and feeds us. Give us the energy and focus to work for health and wholeness. Roots hold me close, wings set me free. . .

This morning our hearts go out to those who are suffering with Covid, with those who have lost loved ones to the virus, to those who are experiencing the relentless effects of this illness. And to one another, we send love.

Reading - "Unitarian Prayer" from *Earth Prayers from Around the World*

The food which we are about to eat

Is Earth, Water, and Sun, compounded through the alchemy of many plants.

Therefore Earth, Water and Sun will become part of us.

This food is also the fruit of the labor of many beings and creatures.

We are grateful for it.

May it give us strength, health, joy.

And may it increase our love.

Reflection - Moria Merriweather

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When I was in my early 20's I happened to tune in to hear Dr. John McDougall on the radio, talking about the health benefits of a vegan diet, something I really had not heard advocated for before in such a strong and unapologetic way. I was curious and bought his book and decided to try out his recommendations.

I consider myself lucky to have stumbled onto this and lucky to have tried it out. It was the beginning of what became an on-going fascination with food as a healing tool, and many specific kinds of plant-food diets.

With health as an important motivation, I am not only vegan – I lean strongly toward eating plants in whole or minimally-processed form – which means that I avoid sugar in all forms and avoid added oil of any kind, preferring whole fruits & vegetables, eating lots of intact grains and potatoes and legumes. Plants as food are a core practice in my life – tied in with everything else from body care to hobbies to spirituality to cooking.

Over time, this interest in food expanded into a very wide interest in how to live healthfully, in home remedies, DIY body care, herbs, and a full range of options for personal health practice.

Through it all, a diet that is primarily minimally processed plant foods has been a primary interest. Plant-centered food has been a through-line, a core practice in my life, and one that has felt enriching, integrating with my loves of plants, food, my body, and health. This path has been deeply meaningful and important in my life and how I care for my health and for my energy.

What are these whole plant foods? They are grains (rice, quinoa, barley), beans, fruits, vegetables (root, green), nuts and seeds.

Please join with me in considering some of the many ways plant foods can nourish our spirits and our lives. Here is a start on my litany of praises to plants – a litany of praises that I will add to all of my life.

Praise be to plants as food

- For they are a daily experience of connection to nature
 - For when we eat, we are eating sun and eating earth, which become part of us, very directly.
 - Frances Moore Lappe is the author of the book *Diet For A Small Planet*, which is now celebrating its 50-year anniversary. She writes: "The act of putting into your mouth what the earth has grown is perhaps your most direct interaction with the earth."

Praise be to plants as food

- Because they bring nutrients from the soil and the energy from sun into form, as their bodies, making these available to us as food

Praise be to plants as food

- Because we are entirely dependent on plants to sustain our lives. Whether we eat the plants directly or eat animals who ate plants – either way, our food depends upon plants. Let us praise plants for sustaining our lives

Praise be to plants as food for all the ways they meet the specific needs of our bodies

For calories – the majority of calories eaten on planet earth come directly from eating plants

- For fiber of different kinds – so essential and so lacking in most American's diets
- For phytonutrients of many kinds that heal us and support us – for beta-carotene in carrots and yams, for sulforaphane in cauliflower and cabbage – for chlorophyll in green leafy vegetables – and so many more that we have identified and that we have not

Praise be to plants as food

- They feel SO COMPATIBLE WITH MY BODY – I experience a vegan diet as being physically compatible and aligned with my body

Praise be to plants as food

- For their many tastes – in addition to the range of tastes in potatoes and corn and bananas, this tastes in this world include such things as basil, turmeric, curry, and peppermint

Praise be to plants as food which can help to heal us, restore us, and maintain our bodies in the best of condition

- While on the one hand eating vegan food does not ensure that one is eating healthiest of food – on the other hand there is broad and compelling evidence that the healthiest diets – like those used to reverse heart disease for example – are exclusively or almost exclusively vegan diets
- Plant-centered diets can be used for reversing and preventing heart disease, which was still the top cause of death in the US, even last year –2020 –with covid
- Plant food diets also lead to health in many other ways, with lots of evidence for the use of plant-centered diets to reverse diabetes, to lose weight, to reduce autoimmune diseases, and for so many other conditions
- Less distress from inability to digest lactose (majority of the world's people cannot digest)

Praise be to plants as food

- They offer us ways to eat that use less land, less water, less pesticides
- They offer us ways to eat that allow us to keep more rain forest intact
- Praise to plant foods for supporting our beloved trees

Praise be to plants as food

- If we, as humanity, were to eat more plants and less animals, we have a huge opportunity in stabilizing the climate
- While there is disagreement on the exact percentage of greenhouse gases (GHG) that are caused by animal agriculture, it is clear that reducing the use of animal foods is essential to stabilize the climate. Animal agriculture is either THE main cause of GHG, or a main cause of GHG, depending on which statistics you wish to use
- Animal agriculture is a large source of methane, and methane dissipates in the environment much more quickly than CO. So if we reduce the use of animal food, we get reduced GHG more quickly which could buy us some time, time that we desperately need.

Praise be to plants as food

- For me eating plants is part of being in right relationship with plants & right relationship with animals – in the relationship I want with both of them and with all my fellow beings

Praise be to plants as food

- if we eat more plants and less meat, it means there is less violence

Praise be to plants as food

- For the love and beauty that food plants bring to us in our gardens and in our farms
- For the peace and love that they broadcast as they grow
- For the love they nourish us with as we eat them

This is my call to plants as food:

- Thank you for your nourishment
- Thank you for your inspiration
- Thank you for the opportunities you afford us for a thriving sustainable environment,
- Thank you for so many beautiful meals

The Morning Offering - “Wind that Shakes the Barley” (Irish reel)

Community Response

- How would you write your own litany of "Praise to Plants as Food"?
- What would you add to today's litany?

Hymn - "For the Earth Forever Turning"

Chalice Extinguishing**Benediction**

May we all find meaning, health and connection through our food.

May we appreciate plants as the source of our sustenance, whether directly through eating them, or through eating animals who ate plants.

May our food truly feed us, in body, mind, heart, and spirit, throughout all of our lives.

May we know our food as love, and may it bring more love into our lives. Amen

Postlude - "Feed the Birds" by Richard M. Sherman and Robert B. Sherman

Sung by Julie Andrews, from the movie *Mary Poppins*

This service can be viewed until January 3, 2022 at:

<https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/9O3c0eBitpCySC3P5ZH4nTdK6HgmZ5xKZmUnBhRVdcsIJcq5WHp8g5s9QSqDJbUt.T7AYN0py8DrrU0vn>

Access Passcode: O4!r2.7M

("Feed the Birds" was not recorded for copyright reasons.)