

Some Thoughts for Contemplation

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Kabandha is an asura. In the Ramayana he is described as having his head in his belly. The symbol reveals that there was a person whose thoughts were all centered in the eating and everything that he could get he could interpret only in terms of eating. All his aspiration was for a good meal every day. All creatures were intended for his eating more than for his service. We could see that in the modern world all efforts proclaim that every thing is for eating. Though all scriptures prescribed that only plants can be food for man or animal, yet since some animals had taken to living on other weaker animals man also has fallen into line with these carnivores. Man was granted a greater power than eating the animal for the animal can be domesticated and made useful in growing more food and not be themselves food. The concept of Vahana or vehicle was mainly intended to explain this transformation of the concept of use or usefulness. All animals are useful for man's work of developing agriculture. Domestication of all animal life is the great leap of man over the animal since he can now control production of plants for his food. Even food could be got from animals but food produced by them in the form of milk etc., Due to exigencies of climate and change and

struggle for survival, man began to cultivate the taste for animal food and turned into animal eater rather than domesticator and now it is not restricted to that at all but for the extraordinary purposes of just skins and so on. Kabandha philosophy; thus leads to what we may call eating-philosophy; today most meetings and conferences are conferences for eating and eating everything, and all social life is built around this congregational eating and promiscuous eating. Though we can say that all satisfaction and allurements are centered round this eating table, and great transactions are taking place round the eating table, yet man is not just an eating animal: values are not just eating and there need not be all this food-centeredness. Food can corrupt and that is why purity in food habits has been said to be most important for being: aharasuddhi is what leads to sattva-suddhi; as the Chandogya Upanishad says. But we are reminded about this being just a kitchen philosophy by very good men who hardly worried about the food. The trouble has been that there has been the basic distinction between the meat-and flesh eating and the plant eating persons and this distinction is basic somewhat to a proper perspective in human affairs as well as spirituality. The former is gross and leads to loss of sensibilities about life whereas the latter does not lead to insensibility about life. Men who can kill animals for food would hardly hesitate to kill men if not for food but for other things linked up with

their food and enjoyment.

The evils of this world are more dependent upon this loss of feeling for life and also the extraordinary appetite for such food that it verily makes for the asura. The power of food is more than the power of the brain. The materialist civilization is geared up for this great appeal to food as the welfare condition of the State. The State's function is to provide food for all: this is truly a welcome thing. But food-habits must be cultivated that will not demoralize man and make him brutish and short-a pseudo-cannibal or incipient one. The great efforts of the Buddha and Mahavira were precisely to put and end to this flesh-centered or sacrificial-animal-food centered civilization of the greedy sacrifices in the name of Brahman. This shift to food-centeredness from God-centeredness is easily had because food is a prasada offering going along with worship. It is a sort of conditioned reflex that has led to linking up sacrifice with flesh-food, or temple-going with sweet-food and so on. It is true that Anna or food is a primary need but it is regulated food that is satvik that brings about health and real happiness rather than other things that promote other tendencies like sexual and other irritations and aberrations. One of the most important features of modern civilization is the growth of hotel and eating houses in plenty, which cultivate and condition tastes that help not health and

goodness in nature but intimidate man to do things which he dare not dream of doing without them. Moral inhibitions are removed and man is turned into a beast- and what with wine and other things. Kabandha civilization starting from a necessity which is good that preserves one from falling below the human line or plane of being develops the tastes that bring down man to the level of a hunter and prepares for the loss of his sensibilities in other directions. His knowledge is centered on these wants and appetites and does not go beyond the sense of smell of food. Indian thinkers always associated food with smell, for smell is the indicator of earth or food, its guna so to speak. Where there is smell there is food and no wonder we are earth bound men relishing smell and seeking it.